

Executive Summary and Recommendations

Friendly Faces Project Background

The project was developed in 2003-2004 by members of the Multi agency asylum seekers providers Forum, as a response to the lack of cultural resources and specialist services available in Wigan which were easily accessible by refugees and asylum seekers.

Wigan and Leigh CVS and Wigan CAB, operating in a consortium, led a funding bid which was accepted by the Big Lottery. £250,286 was awarded over a three year period (April 2004 - April 2007) .

The project went live on 19th April 2004 operating on Big lottery funding alone up to now. In early 2006 it was decided that there were continuing needs for the project's services and that it should expand to encompass all new migrants (not just asylum seekers and refugees). At the time of writing the project is preparing to become an independent organisation - Support for Wigan Arrivals Project (SWAP).

Changes in the Operating Environment

Government Policy on immigration and asylum has moved at an extremely rapid pace, causing many changes in the operating environment. Friendly Faces has had to adapt quickly to new realities faced by the client group and this has impacted on its ability to meet the original targets.

Changes in the wider environment have had both direct and indirect effects on clients and so on the project.

Direct effects include:

- Generally quicker (a matter of months rather than years) determination decisions.
- Introduction of the New Asylum Model - representing a total rethink in the way asylum claims are administered and bringing with it extremely rapid (matter of days or weeks) determination decisions for some categories of asylum seeker.
- Introduction of "induction centres" - where some categories of new arrivals are housed for a few weeks prior to longer term dispersal.
- Increased "turnover" of asylum seekers in temporary housing in Wigan.
- Reduction in amount of legal aid available to asylum seekers.
- Introduction of Section 9: allowing families with negative decisions to have support and accommodation withdrawn regardless of their position vis a vis deportation.
- Introduction of advance charging for hospital care for those who are destitute.
- Arrival of other new migrants, particularly new migrant workers from the New Europe.

Indirect effects include:

- Increased levels of destitution - both for those who have had positive decisions and those who have negative decisions - the speeding up of decision making has meant that those who are becoming destitute have few, if any local contacts and are therefore not supported in the usual way (by the community at large).
- The introduction of induction centres and segmentation have led to more moves per client, disrupting the integration process.
- The induction process means that some clients arriving in Wigan have a very short term stay ahead (less than 2 months).
- Problems in obtaining legal representation.
- The speed of change of legislation has meant it is very difficult for all service providers to keep up to date and understand the system that is in place to support asylum seekers.
- Increased sense of insecurity among clients.

PROJECT ACHEIVEMENTS: OUTPUTS

Steering Group: Summary

The steering group has a good mix of membership including a volunteer and a client representative and has been supportive towards the project. However, the steering group has no control over key project development issues such as long-term strategic and business planning. These roles fall within the capability of the “hosting” agency - the CVS. The CVS has discharged its duties appropriately but the over complicated management structure, coupled with a very small staff team (1 project manager and 1 full-time administrator, converting to 1 part-time project administrator and 1 part-time case work administrator in October 2005) and a rapidly changing operational environment has led to an excessive workload for the Project Manager.

Steering Group: Recommendations

- i. With the project now moving on to independence, reviewing its managerial structure and establishing an independent Board of Governors, it is important that those involved:
 - take a careful look at the roles and responsibilities of governors vis a vis steering group members.
 - pay particular attention to developing a strong working relationship between the Chair and the Executive Officer.
 - develop the board as a working entity, bringing practical and personal skills to the table being more important than representing the views of a particular agency.
 - retain seats for a volunteer and a client representative.

Volunteer Recruitment, Retention and Training : Summary

The project recruited 45 out of an initial target of 48 volunteer mentors.

In years 2 and 3 the project maintained active volunteer rates of between 18-22 individuals.

Retention rates among volunteers were good with the project retaining 50% of those recruited. Linguistic ability seems to be a factor in retention of volunteers with 32% of those volunteers who have left the project being English only speakers, whereas only 9% of the current active volunteer group fall into this category.

Fig 1 Volunteer Statistics : Languages spoken - other than English (current volunteers)

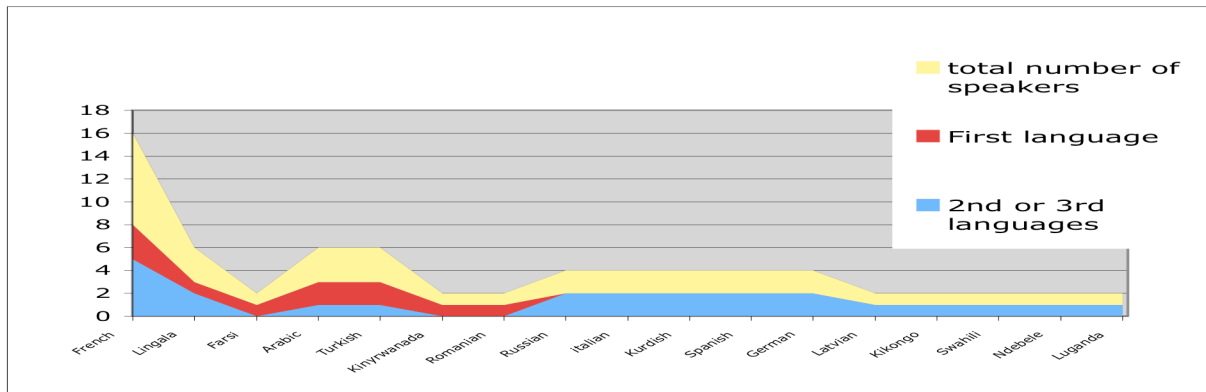
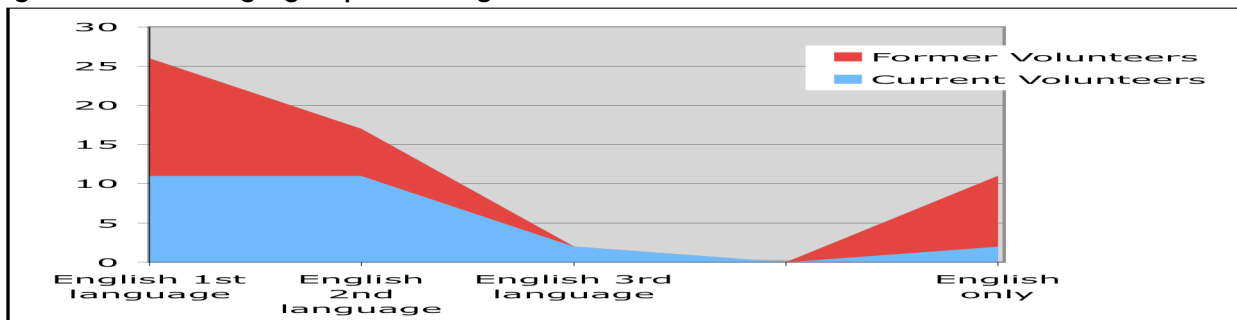


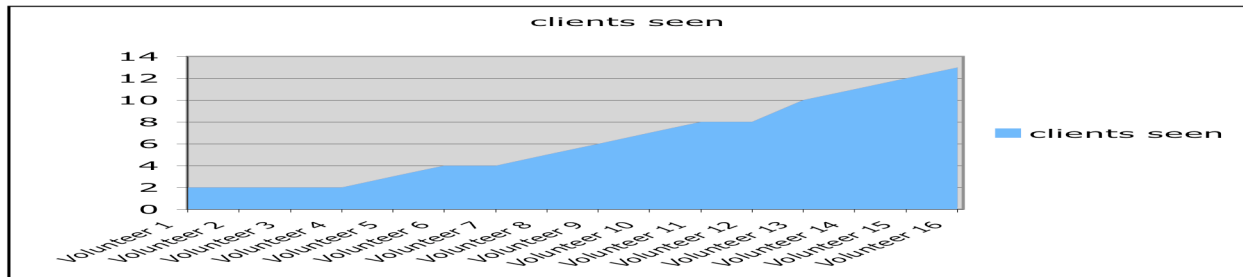
Fig 2 Volunteers languages spoken - English



Volunteer satisfaction was high overall with all those consulted feeling valued by the Friendly Faces team and rating the volunteer support processes highly.

Work rates were also high with more than 34% of active volunteers having mentored more than 6 clients and 17% more than 10 clients.

Fig 4 Volunteer Activity Pattern (current active volunteers)



Reflecting the original project design that valued the idea of client group and host community group volunteers working side by side, the diversity position of the volunteer body was good with 26% of volunteers recruited from within the client group and a further 24% from non-client group BME backgrounds.

A total of 14 volunteer training courses were held providing 200 volunteer training days.

Volunteer Recruitment, Retention & Training: Recommendations

- i. The Project would benefit from a small increase in the number of volunteer mentors, particularly those with abilities in languages which are in high demand.
- ii. The project has shown a good track record in recruiting and retaining volunteers from the client group and from non client BME groups, as well as those with language skills. The project should build on these successes and target individuals who fit these profiles.
- iii. The Project needs to retain the qualities and support mechanisms that that have helped to produce the high retention rate and good work rate of the current mentor group.
- iv. The project should develop other volunteering opportunities (beyond the mentoring role) which might help them to recruit and retain different kinds of volunteers (ie those with fixed time availability or those who wish to acquire more focussed experience or develop particular skills).
- v. The project should look in to the possibility of running a more formal volunteering or intern type process (alongside the mentoring process) to help current and potential volunteers from within the client group gain solid work experience.

Client Referrals: Summary

Arrivals position

The number of asylum seekers living in the Borough has halved, yet the number of new arrivals to the Borough has shown a growth trajectory. The overall number of beds in asylum accommodation has dropped, but the turnover is much higher. The people however, do not disappear, they just cease to register in the asylum statistics.

External policy changes and changes in the housing contracts situation have had a major impact on the figures for new asylum seeker arrivals in the Borough (as with elsewhere in the country). These external factors are set to continue evolving at a rapid rate, causing a total lack of stability in the arrivals scenario.

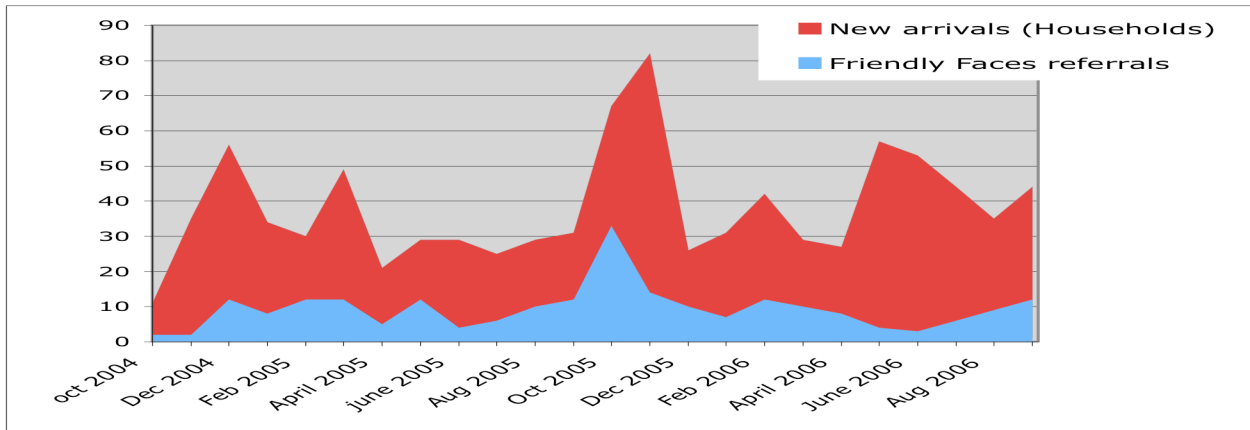
Policy changes have also resulted in individuals moving more quickly through the asylum process and receiving much more rapid decisions on their asylum claims. This situation is expected to continue,

becoming the norm in the foreseeable future. Whilst this has a major impact on the number of **asylum seekers** as opposed to **refugees** living in any one place, the **personal and social integration needs** of newly arrived clients remain constant, regardless of their immigration status.

Referrals to Friendly Faces

Friendly Faces achieved 226 referrals (out of an original target of 288) and was able to work with 172 of these cases. If we go beyond the basic numerical targets set out in the original project proposal, and instead use targets based on % of new arrivals referred and % worked with Friendly Faces has achieved referral rates of 32.5% and a clients worked with rate of 25%. Thus the Project has superceded the proposed referral rate and reached a position of service provision very close to the original referral rate suggested (26% of new arrivals).

Fig 5 . Comparing new arrivals with Friendly Faces referrals



However, 23% (52 individuals or families) of those referred to the project were turned away and this necessity was felt very deeply by the staff. Where clients were turned away this was due to the lack of a language match in 75% of cases.

Unsurprisingly, the client body shows a remarkable degree of diversity.

- 45 countries are represented within the client group (See: Evidence 1.1.4).
- The top four countries of origin Eritrea, Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo and Cameroon. (See Evidence 1.1.2 for more details by year)
- The majority (58%) of clients came from African countries with a further 25% coming from the Middle East (See: Evidence 1.1.3)

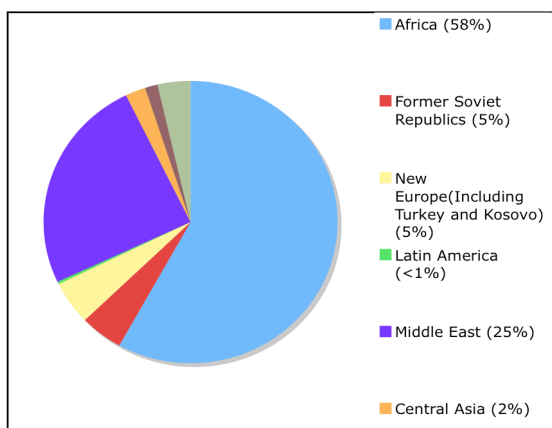


Fig 6 Clients origins by continent

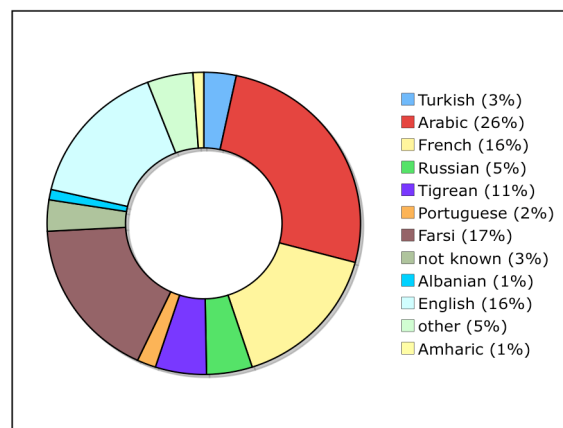


Fig 7 Clients first language

- 20 languages are represented as first languages - with many clients speaking 2 or more languages fluently. (See: Evidence 1.2.2).
- 16% were 1st language English speakers with a further 32% speaking good English on referral.
- 52% spoke little or no English on referral (See: Evidence 1.2.4).
- The top 3 Languages spoken are Arabic, Farsi, French and English (joint 3rd).

Clearly the linguistic diversity of the client group represents a major challenge. The project had no budget for interpretation and it is to the great credit of the Project and it's volunteers that they have been willing and able to communicate with clients from so many diverse backgrounds.

Client Referrals: Recommendations

- i. It is interesting to note that 4 out of the 5 key informants from the staff and management committee felt that the project would not achieve its targets fully. I urge them to look again at the pattern of new arrivals and client referrals. In this way I hope they will feel more positive about the project's achievements and be able to concentrate on developing constructive and creative responses to the referrals context.

*“ Friendly Faces has achieved some of what it set out to achieve, however, external factors such as the severe drop in numbers of asylum seekers in the Borough has meant its objectives will not be fully met”
- Key informant*

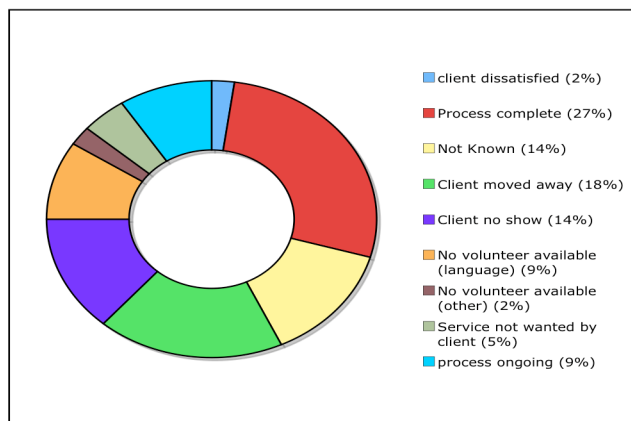
- ii. Faced with a rapidly changing external environment, Friendly Faces needs more flexibility to respond to the integration of newly arrived migrants (regardless of immigration status or position in the immigration processing system).
- iii. Services provided should be modelled to look at 3 aspects of the integration process:
 - Responding to client integration needs
 - Work with mainstream service providers to ensure appropriate knowledge and treatment of newly arrived migrants
 - Work which impacts on the host communities' awareness of and attitude towards newly arrived migrants.
- iv. Whilst the power of direct (if imperfect) communication should not be underestimated, the project needs to have better access to interpreters in order to avoid turning clients away due to lack of linguistic capacity. At the very minimum this necessitates a small budget for interpreters.
- v. As there is currently no operational interpreting service in Wigan and Leigh, consideration should be given to developing interpreting capacity within the project for example:
 - by encouraging the learning of short supply languages within the volunteer body,
 - by establishing an interpreters training scheme,
 - by actively recruiting staff and volunteers with specific language competence.

The Mentoring Process: Summary

Based on sampling 25% of client case files:

- Friendly Faces could be said to have fully discharged its mentoring commitment in only 36% of the cases referred.
- Up to 33% of the clients referred were “moved away” from Wigan as a result of the workings of the asylum system, and thus Friendly Faces was unable to achieve its goals with these clients.
- In 14% of cases there was insufficient information held on file to report on the individual case outcome.

Fig 8 Case outcomes of clients



Whilst the mentoring process has been useful to those who have accessed it, many processes have remained incomplete as a result of the high degree of mobility of the client group. In addition a significant proportion of cases have been too complex to handle appropriately within the mentoring context or have come back to the project some weeks or months later for additional case work support.

The flexibility of the project in responding to human needs has marked its success but has also caused problems, in short - the project has outgrown its initial brief and needs to restructure so that it can properly resource itself to respond.

The Mentoring Process: Recommendations

The mentoring process should be maintained as part of the Project's core business, the very personal and practical nature of the support provided is part of why the project has been so successful in winning the trust and confidence of clients.

Additional programme capacity needs to be sought in order to provide full-time case work back up to the volunteers and a drop-in type case work service within the office.

In order that crisis interventions can be professionally supported, there needs to be a formal policy and set of procedures for crisis interventions (to include an out of hours duty arrangement).

A review of case work documentation should take place, with a view to simplifying the record keeping duties of volunteers.

PROJECT ACHIEVEMENTS OUTCOMES

Client Outcomes: Summary

Social inclusion

The Home Office Integration framework suggests indicators relating to:

- the degree of engagement with a variety of service providers
- Social Bonds (relating to social connections between individuals within a defined demographic group or community)
- Social Bridges (social connections between individuals and groups from different demographic groups or communities)

as being relevant in measuring social integration.¹

Working with these ideas we asked clients about

- their friendships
- their activity patterns
- their feelings about Wigan as a potential long-term home

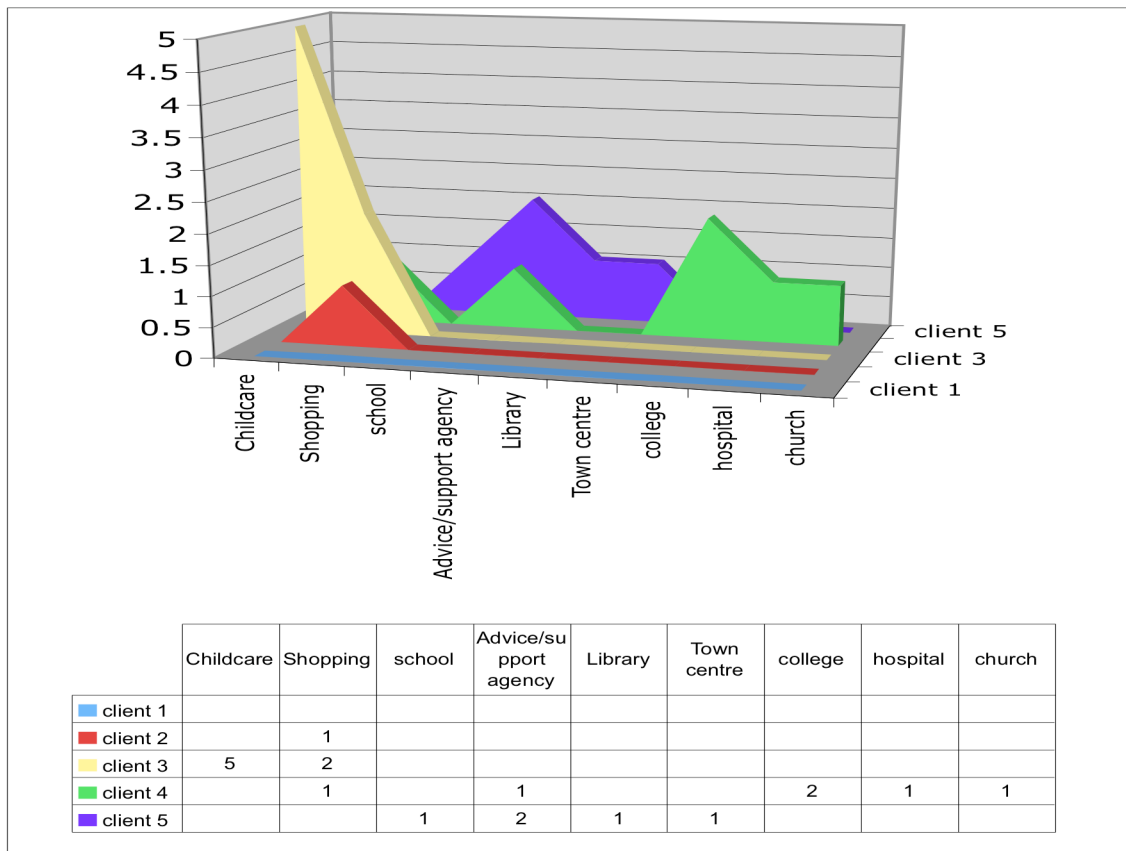
Many clients (66%) feel that they would consider living in Wigan long-term if they had a choice on achieving refugee status. All those questioned stated that they had made friends locally and the majority had established connections with places such as schools, college etc. Of the small sample (6 clients) who were asked about the places they visited, most went out of their homes at least 3 times a week, some appeared to have quite a wide range of connections in terms of the places they visited, others showed a more narrow set of connections and 1 did not go out at all.

The orientation support given by Friendly Faces has helped those who wish to go out to locate and feel comfortable in travelling to and being at certain places: this may have happened anyway for these

¹ Indicators of Integration, Home Office Development and Practice Reports . Crown copyright 2004

clients, but it seems likely that the assistance of Friendly Faces has at least been helpful in bringing this about smoothly and relatively quickly.

Fig 9 : Snapshot of client activity patterns over 1 week



How much impact Friendly Faces has on the formation of local friendships is difficult to quantify, though a number of clients in the January questionnaire and in the case file notes have regarded their mentors as friends and others have formed friendships through participation in activities such as football.

In terms of emotional impact, the clients who participated in the evaluation process described some positive feelings, showing a marked improvement of those questioned in the baseline survey, whose descriptions of their emotional state on arrival in Wigan were overwhelmingly negative. That being said, there is still considerable loneliness, isolation and sadness and a high degree of confusion and anxiety among the group. Again it is difficult to say how much the clients feelings are impacted by the association with Friendly Faces and the support of the mentors.

Fig 10 Clients' feelings : from November 2006 interviews

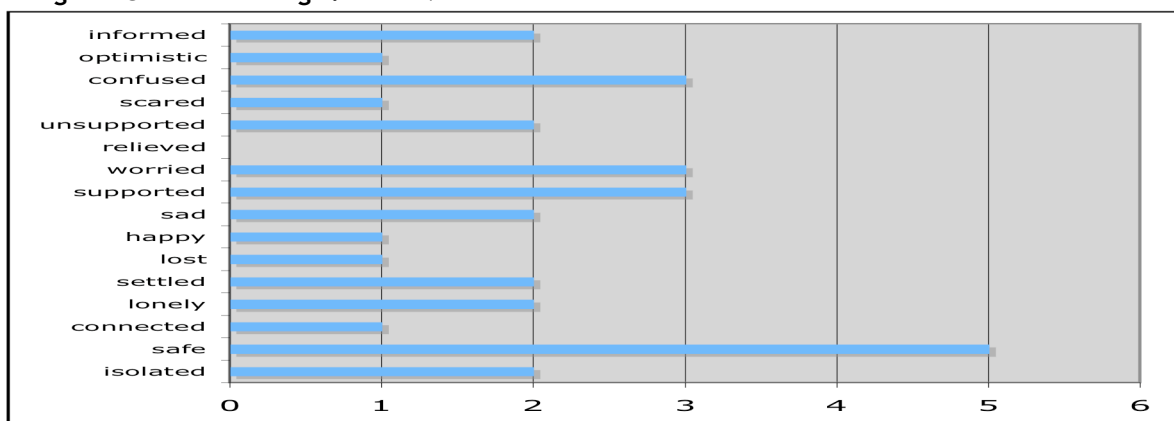
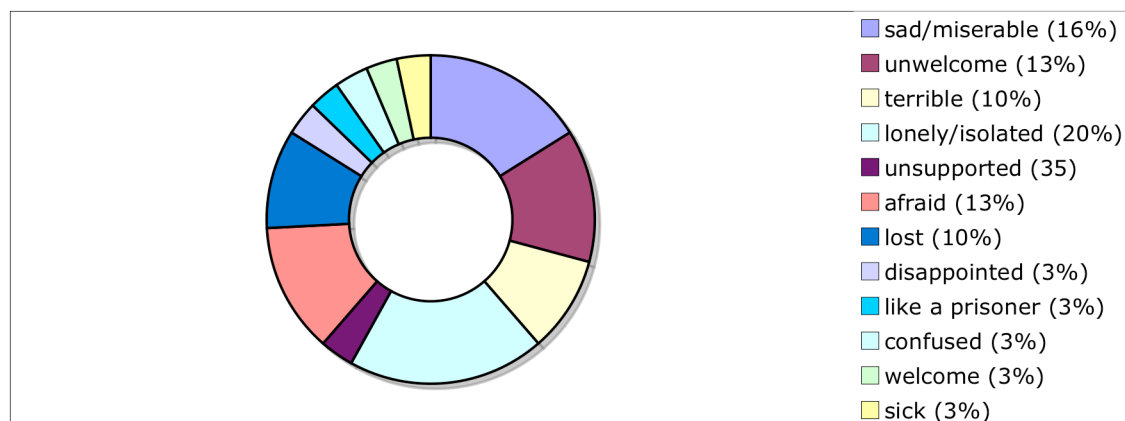


Fig 11 Baseline data : feelings on arrival in Wigan



Improved client employability

It was suggested that the experience of volunteering for Friendly faces could improve client employability by helping the to gain confidence and experience in working in UK systems and by offering training within the mentoring process.

It seems that volunteering for Friendly Faces does indeed enhance client employability with 50% of those clients who have volunteered within the project now in work, half of these in their original professional capacities.

Client Outcomes: Recommendations

- i. There is still very little research on the integration process, and some disagreement as to what integration is, thus it is difficult to arrive at any real conclusions about this subject in a report like this. It would be interesting to develop a more detailed study to look at client integration over specified time periods, in order to look at how this process happens, what are the variables and how much impact a project like Friendly Faces has.
- ii. More work needs to be done promoting and developing social bonds between individuals within the new migrant communities. In a place like Wigan, with a very small BME population there are very few BME community groups of any kind and few opportunities for communities to meet together. Friendly Faces should explore the possibility of working with other organisations who have a role in bringing new migrants to the Wigan area - in particular Wigan and Leigh College - to develop more interesting and diverse social opportunities for new migrants.
- iii. Friendly Faces should aim to build on its good track record of working with volunteers from asylum seeking and/or refugee communities, looking at expanding the number and range of volunteer opportunities.
- iv. Friendly Faces could also explore the idea of working with other organisations to develop good quality volunteering opportunities for members of the asylum seeking and/or refugee communities.

Host Community Outcomes: Summary

The project has had an impact on the host community beyond the expectations of the original proposal. The host community volunteers have the opportunity to meet and interact with asylum seekers and refugees both as clients and as colleagues and they have been able to pass on their experiences to others through their own social networks.

The value of host community mentors and client group mentors working side by side on equal terms has a positive effect on both groups, providing them with a depth and breadth of understanding and helping them to form personal relationships across communities.

Service providers have also commented on the positive impact that working with asylum seekers has had on their own understanding and attitudes, and have talked about how personal interactions between asylum seekers and individual members of the host community has a positive impact on attitudes.

These views are supported by research showing that personal interaction with asylum seekers has a positive effect on public attitudes.²

It is important to value and support this aspect of Friendly Faces project work for its low key yet positively effective impact on community cohesion.

The approach chimes well with the recommendations of Ian Read and Gavin Turnbull who carried out research into community cohesion issues in Wigan in 2004:

“We would advocate the provision of space and support to encourage the organic growth of community and individual networks.”

The Friendly Faces project has started to build on this idea by developing opportunities (such as football) for this kind of cross-community contact, but is hampered by lack of capacity and lack of funding for such activities, and by a project structure designed around the mentoring activities alone.

Host Community Outcomes: Recommendations

- i. The role of Friendly Faces in developing cross-community knowledge and understanding should be supported as part of the community cohesion agenda.
- ii. The project should expand the number and type of volunteer roles so that more can benefit.
- iii. The project should build on its embryonic programme of social activities, looking particularly at activities which allow asylum seekers and members of the host community to participate jointly and on equal terms.
- iv. In order to achieve this Friendly Faces should consider the development of a project manager post, to support the development of volunteers as activity coordinators.

Mainstream Service Provider Outcomes: Summary

Friendly Faces has made a positive contribution in Wigan and has accepted many referrals from a variety of agencies, some of whom had no internal mechanism for assessing general integration needs or providing non specific support in this regard. Friendly Faces is clearly meeting needs that others do not meet especially in the areas of; cultural contacts, cultural recognition, language support, supporting the development of social networks, resettlement needs, support in accessing information and providing information about rights and services.

Fig 12 Referring agencies: Referrals habits

	Agency 1	Agency 2	Agency 3	Agency 4	Agency 5	Agency 6
9.1.1 How many new migrants do you see per month?	I teach ESOL students and am not always aware of their status	Approx 10 families per month - less since school asylum families moved out of area	16 per month - induction housing 8 per month - homeless refugees 24-40 per month general refugee/asylum seekers 14 per month new migrants from eastern Europe	occasionally	Refugees/asylum seekers 16 per month Others 160 per month	5 refugees/asylum seekers - this tends to fluctuate % others
9.1.2 From what do the new migrants come ?	All over the world but mainly Iran and African countries	Various Poland	Various Lithuania Poland Slovakia	Lithuania Poland Latvia	Poland Latvia Lithuania Czech republic Latvia Slovakia	Varies
9.1.3 What % do you refer to Friendly Faces?	1 since Sept 06	100%	75%	(Not answered)	75% of refugee/asylum seeking group	20%
9.1.4	Give out FF info	Refer all regardless	Inform the clients about	(Not	To help clients to	Based on our

² Source: *Warm welcome? Understanding Public attitudes to asylum seekers in Scotland IPPR, June 2006*

What referral criteria do you use?	and refer them if they express an interest	of my perception of support needs	FF refer then if they request it	answered)	access services	own client needs assessment and what friendly faces can offer
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Friendly Faces has played a role in coordination around asylum issues but this has been more of an implicit than explicit function.

Friendly Faces has provided 686.5 days³ of basic training to participants from 64 organisations.

Mainstream Service Provider Outcomes: Recommendations

- i. **The project needs to recognise the time investment necessary to develop effective working relationships with mainstream service providers and ensure this activity is properly planned for and resourced within the business plan. This is particularly relevant in the field of new migrant support where the number and type of service providers involved on different levels shifts significantly from one government White Paper to the next.**
- ii. **Friendly Faces should continue its basic training provision and look at expanding this to work in more depth with specific services on good practice issues - perhaps using a seminar format as a means of achieving this.**
- iii. **Friendly Faces should continue to develop initiatives that promote coordination, using the trust and confidence it has gained among service providers and the flexibility of its voluntary sector status to develop opportunities for agencies to debate and cross-fertilise ideas and experiences.**

CONCLUSIONS

Plagued with a rash of government policy changes leading to huge variations in arrivals figures and a massively diverse client base, not to mention a tiny staff body, Friendly Faces has done remarkably well to attain the recruitment and referral rates that it has achieved.

Though the crude output figures do not meet the numerical targets set out in the original proposal, the target rate taken as a % of new arrivals has been met.

The project has had excellent results in volunteer diversity, volunteer retention and volunteer satisfaction and has contributed to helping 50% of its client group volunteers to progress into employment.

The success of the volunteer programme has had unintended outcomes in terms of integration and community cohesion - supporting a low key, organic system that allows the development of strong interpersonal connections and friendships across the host, asylum seeking and other new migrant communities.

***“Our mentoring model promotes true integration
- host and new population working together.”***

The Project has developed a supportive and flexible organisational culture which has helped win the trust and respect of asylum seekers and is beginning to attract other categories of new migrants.

The project has supported clients in many ways: to access services, to meet people, to feel comfortable with the local environment and achieves at least some level of “peace of mind” milestones such as feeling safe, supported and informed.

In addition the Project has provided crisis support to a number of clients and helped them to cope with difficult and traumatic situations.

³ calculated at number of days training X number of participants

“In a number of cases Friendly Faces’ impact has been very significant, helping individuals and families keep their heads above water and come to terms with life in Wigan.”

Service providers have benefited by finding a responsive and trustworthy local agency to which to refer clients with needs that are beyond their remit. They have also benefited from having additional local expertise in new migrant issues and have been able to use their relationship with Friendly Faces to develop their ideas and discussions about integration, community cohesion and multi-culturalism as well as improving their knowledge of refugee affairs.

Though often working at the edge of its capacity, the project has developed and evolved in a constructive and needs sensitive way. It has developed effective working practices and has been of significant benefit not just to the clients but to the host community volunteers and to the Borough of Wigan in general.

“The personal impact on all (host community members) who are involved with us - staff, volunteers, service providers, student interns - is very high.”