



Commission for
Rural Communities

Tackling rural disadvantage

Rural Migrant Worker Projects

Helping migrant
workers in
West Hull
to help themselves



“Hull Together”

Helping migrant workers in West Hull to help themselves

Introduction

The city of Hull sits at the point where the Rivers Humber and Hull meet. It has been a port since the Middle Ages, and so its people are used to the comings and goings of foreign ships and foreign people. In the past five or six years, however, and since the decline of its long-established fishing fleet, the city, along with the rest of the UK, has seen the arrival of migrant workers from Europe and elsewhere, drawn by their need for work, and our need for labour. Life for many of them, in Hull and elsewhere, is, as Migrant Workers' Chaplain, Revd David de Vergy pointed out in a recent paper (www.crc-online.org.uk/downloads/Migrant%20Workers%20paper%20David%20de%20Vergy.doc), anything but easy.

Two hundred years after William Wilberforce, who was born and educated in Hull, and was its MP from 1780 until 1784, finally succeeded in abolishing the slave trade in the British Empire, it is disturbing to note that, according to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (www.jrf.org.uk/knowledge/findings/socialpolicy/2035.asp), examples of exploitation that border on slave-like conditions still exist in Britain today. Wilberforce would, however, be proud to learn that the University of Hull helped to write the Joseph Rowntree report (www.hull.ac.uk/05/wise/index.html), and that a lot of good work is being done by church groups and others in and around Hull to bridge the gap between the migrant workers and the wider community.

Hull's Newcomers

The vast majority (4,000-5,000) of the newcomers to Hull hail from Poland. Although some work locally in the professions for which they trained (e.g. pharmacy and teaching), most are bused daily to and from their place of work (e.g. an abattoir in Malton). Other newcomers to Hull come from India, the Philippines, Slovakia, Lithuania, and the Ukraine. According to Dr Patrick Doyle, who has done much to help the newcomers, "*The important thing is to help them help themselves.*" This is the story of how Patrick and his colleagues have helped people do just that, with relatively little money (no grant aid was needed, although donations have been made by locals and by the Society of St. Vincent de Paul [www.svp.org.uk]), but a lot of determination and faith.

Work With the Polish Community

Patrick is a Roman Catholic, as are 95% of Poles, and many of the other migrant workers, including some of those from India. Early in 2006 he attended a conference about migrant workers in Selby organized by the Churches' Regional Commission for Yorkshire and the Humber (www.crc-online.org.uk/about.asp?mid=87). Prompted by what he heard at the conference about, for example, how the Methodist Church in Goole, led by Peter Moran (www.crc-online.org.uk/downloads/Issue%2015%20spirit%20level.pdf), had opened their buildings to Polish workers, Patrick, working closely with Father William Massie, the Parish Priest in West Hull (www.westhullparishes.co.uk), and Greg Futyma, a Polish teacher and community leader, set about forming a Polish Association, and a Polish Choir.

In essence the work seeks to meet both the spiritual and everyday needs of the visitors for advice and support. The objectives, according to Patrick, were limited but, nevertheless, of great importance to the immigrant communities. For example, the Polish Association was helped to draft a constitution, set up a website (www.hull.pl), and establish contact with support agencies such as the police, education, local authorities, and health services. A survey of Polish workers revealed that approximately 65% of Hull's Polish population are under 30, nearly 43% are women, that only 5% had lived in Hull more than two years, and that most of the respondents were employed in warehouses or factories.

To help reinforce the important link between the Poles and the church, Greg and his family were allowed to live in a church house. Faith is very important to the Polish community, but it is equally important to note that the support provided in Hull is available to everyone, irrespective of their beliefs. Support and advice meetings, initially held weekly, are now held twice each week in a church room, and are attended by, for example, the local community Police Officer. These are also social events where Polish food, newspapers and company can be found. A welcome pack was produced, and 3,000 copies distributed. There was, not surprisingly, a need (and demand) for English language lessons, and these have been provided.

Discussions with health professionals resulted in patient records being obtained from Poland, which enabled, for example, appropriate inoculations to be given to the workers' children. Dawn Roberts, Hull City Council's Chief Equalities Officer (www.hullcc.gov.uk), attended several meetings, and helped to oil the organizational wheels. In addition to these local developments, representatives of the Polish Association helped to inform the views of the Low Pay Commission during a meeting with two Commissioners. As a consequence of this, the Regional Trades Union Council, working with the Polish community, held a conference for migrant workers in the Autumn of 2006, attended by various Unions, housing experts, and local authorities.

Greg now has a job as a teacher in Hull, and has moved into a flat in the city. The Polish choir is well established, and the Polish Association is largely self-managing. Just before Christmas, 2006, and following negotiations between the church authorities and others (including the Polish Consul in Hull), a Polish priest was appointed to minister to Hull's Polish community (although the Priest's parish extends, in effect, as far afield as York!).

Following a conference in Hull in August, 2006, it was decided to form, 'Hull Together', an organization for people interested and involved in the welfare of all migrant groups. As a result, meetings have been held involving, for example, both Poles and Filipinos, and development work with the other migrant communities continues.

Work With Other Communities

The various immigrant communities are, of course, different, both in terms of their needs, and the contributions they make. The Philippine and Indian communities, for example, contain many doctors and nurses, and are relatively few in number, whereas the Polish community, although as mentioned above, is not without professionals and tradesmen, tends to contain more factory, warehouse, horticulture and agriculture-related workers. The association model developed by Patrick and his colleagues has, however, been adopted by other nationalities, and there are now active, fully constituted Indian and Filipino Associations. In May, 2006, the Lord Mayor presented Coats of Arms to all the Associations, and used the opportunity to reinforce the point that not only are association members Poles, or Indians, they are *Hull* Poles, Indians, and Filipinos.

Summary

One of the lessons that the people involved in this project learnt early on was that essentially people know what they need, but, as newcomers to a country, they need help to find it – hence the emphasis on supported **self-help**, and the use made of the professional expertise – and individual willingness – of the people who work, for example, for the education, health, police, housing, and employment services. An approach has been made by the group to the Polish community in Grimsby, to see if help is needed. There is also a possibility that the group, together with the City Council, the TUC, and the church, could provide help in Selby and Goole.

In short, the project is a good example of how a relatively small number of individuals can make a big difference to the lives of potentially marginalised people, simply by helping them to help themselves. This approach is, it is hoped, beginning to bring the people of Hull, together.

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