

Annual report of the Community Involvement Officer (Minority Communities)

I am pleased to present the Annual Report of the City of York Council 'MYnority York' project for 2020. This is my first Annual Report in the role of Community Involvement Officer (Minority Communities). I would like to thank all partners and volunteers for their support and collaboration over this challenging year. I have no doubt that this positive momentum would not have happened without Laura Clark, Head of Communities and Equalities, who has been an amazing mentor. Looking back, I am proud to say this was a good year for the project, despite all the challenges.

Vision

In 2019 City of York Council (CYC) received funding from the Home Office to support vulnerable European Union (EU) migrants in applying for the EU Settlement Scheme giving them right to remain in the UK. The CYC project vision was for an inclusive society that protects residents' rights and enables them to reach their full potential. Set up as a signposting service, 'MYnority York' aims to bring migrant communities and local services together. The two year project promotes equality, diversity, inclusiveness and empathy while supporting migrant residents on their journey to become settled in their new communities in York.

Lockdown and reshaping our work

2020 was an important year for MYnority York. The project has faced some significant challenges in the past year; however, despite this, positive work has continued. During the lockdown we delivered work that had an incredible impact on migrants' lives in the City. During the last nine months, the project managed to assist people in addressing immediate difficulties while simultaneously working through the main issues impacting their lives.

In partnership with local organisations and projects such as Citizens Advice York (CAY), York Learning, York St John University and Refugee Action York (RAY) we have assisted over 401 clients. Of that number 295 were from York itself, 66 from North Yorkshire and 40 from South and West Yorkshire.



Following the recruitment of ten volunteers from migrant communities the project has the capacity to provide language and cultural support in over five languages. Volunteers helped with promoting and running all aspects of the project, especially key activities such as ‘Welcome to York’ and the Migrant ‘Hub’. Outreach work the project delivered both in the community pre-lockdown (St Joseph’s Church and West Offices) and online (Listening Lunch) aimed to reduce isolation and helped migrants to gain skills to increase their life and career opportunities. In particular the ‘Welcome to York’ sessions and the Community Interpreters initiative (see below) helped improve employability by facilitating ‘Access to English’ classes and creating volunteer positions. As a result of this outreach work we have successfully engaged one to one with over 70 residents.

York Explore Community Interpreters

In the last nine months we have recruited volunteers from migrant communities who are working together to open a new outreach service, the York Migrant Hub. We already have a partnership arrangement at St

Joseph's Church and delivered one to one work pre-lockdown. Our plan is for the hub to become a Saturday community hub for migrants in York; a one stop shop for local residents. The sessions will be run in partnership with York Explore and delivered in collaboration with a cohort of York St John University Law Students and volunteer community interpreters.



The volunteers were very happy to attend training to enable them to offer

signposting services, as well as acting as ambassadors for the EUSS scheme and other services such as Hate Crime reporting and Community Interpreting York. We look forward to launching this project once Covid-19 restrictions ease.

Listening Lunch

With the support of volunteers we have begun to gain the confidence of communities and recently delivered a successful one off event in collaboration with Healthwatch. [Please see annex.](#)

Welcome to York Session

Welcome to York started as a signposting session and has slowly developed into informal group learning for migrants and ethnic minorities. One of the clear emerging themes during the sessions has been employability. Since Migration Yorkshire has recently appointed an employability worker, we have worked in collaboration to try and create a Thursday drop-in session. Due to lockdown restrictions this is yet to take place face-to-face; however, every client signposted to the programme to date has obtained a paid position.

Case Study February 2020

'M' is Romanian, a single mother with 2 young daughters. M is on a very low income. On arrival in York, she secured work through an

agency in a hotel; unfortunately she became homeless after arguments with her friend and housemate. When she first came to CYC for support, she needed help to translate some emails in which her Housing Options Worker requested some further information. After an initial discussion with her it came clear that also actually support with multiple, complex issues. M started to attend 'Welcome to York' sessions and managed to become more confident with English speaking and also managed to make new friends. I also found out that neither herself, nor her daughters, had applied for EUSS. I made an appointment with CAY and I helped with the translation. M was also struggling emotionally to cope with the uncertainty in her life and I referred her to York Women Counselling. M is currently attending York Learning English classes and has managed to find better, permanent employment.

More feedback from the sessions:

"I felt so well in here, confidence and happy. Thanks Bianca. Can't wait for the next sessions". Estefania (Spain)

"The course was interesting and in the same time fun". D. B.

"It was something new for me, I felt good and I forgot about everything that is happening home." Gina

"It was an extremely fun and intriguing English course. There was a lot of laughter and we all learned something new."

"A great session with lots of information and lovely atmosphere".
Mihaela (Romania)

"The course was really educational, fun and contained a lot of useful information."

"I would like to know more about communication respect otherwise all my respect."

Migrant Voice York

Based on a Migration Yorkshire report (DWP data), 1,190 people from 54 countries moved to York in 2018. Across Yorkshire, recent migrants still come from EU countries such as Romania, Italy and Poland.

However, for many people who have lived in York for many years Brexit has been a traumatic experience and not being able to have a say in the issues that matter to them has left them disempowered and

marginalised. As a result, the perception of UK as a welcoming country has shifted and this has often had negative effects on the mental health of EU citizens.

I have noticed in the course of my work that in the last six months there has been an increase on people having issues with their neighbours due to noise disturbance, parking and pets etc. The EU nationals believe that the problems they have in their community are actually linked to their nationality or race. When signposting to other services or charities the residents felt most comfortable discussing their feelings with other EU citizens or migrants as they felt that British people could not fully understand their experience.

“I have problems with my neighbour who is racist and only blocks my car in the parking area“

“I received a letter from the council regarding my puppy but I think they are racist because I have been home that day“

“Thanks for all your help and guidance to us. It is that as head of the home I had many fears about this emergency situation. We decided to settle in this country and start a new life and suddenly this whole situation that left us with fear. Thank you for all your information and support in the face of our uncertainties. God bless you and prosper more every day.”

“I would like to thank you and I appreciate every moment you have offered us. Sincerely, one more time thank you, because of you, we are well “

I initially hoped to signpost people to organisations such as the York Racial Equality Network (YREN) Migrant Forum. Unfortunately, at that time the organisation was not providing this service. The more I engaged with the migrant community in York the more I realised how valuable their experience of the Brexit process was and how important it was to formally recognise it. Therefore I decided to liaise with staff from York St John University. In partnership we have created a questionnaire around the issues we could see reoccurring in dialogue with migrant communities. What we ultimately tried to achieve was to formalise my initial findings which reveal insights into how Brexit and Covid-19 are impacting on EU citizens' mental health and wellbeing. At the time of writing this questionnaire is still in the final stage of approval by the

relevant ethics committees. We hope that the findings of this survey will be published in Spring 2021.

Trends in exploitation

The latest available statistics from ONS state that in the year ending 2018 there was a 68% increase in modern slavery and only 23% of the victims were British nationals. Moreover, in many cases this exploitation takes place within businesses run by members of their own communities, therefore making it even more challenging to break this cycle.

Furthermore, the living situation of vulnerable workers is often chaotic and this can escalate if a worker is not able to enforce his or her rights or does not know how to.

In the UK, immigration advice and services must be provided by registered advisers. It is an offence to give immigration advice and provide immigration services (e.g. filling in forms) without appropriate registration with the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC). However, the number of people portraying themselves as consultants or accountant continues to rise, particularly during lockdown. It is alarming the fees which these individuals advertise their services for applications for self-employed grants, tax return or universal credit claims etc. The migrants' forum are inundated with claims from these small businesses which request 10% of the amount received by the claimant.

Some recent examples:

- A resident found that the email address used to make a claim for universal credit and self-assessment was in fact the consultant's personal email address;
- A resident who contacted me to inform me that due to the furlough scheme he had agreed to pay £100 a month in exchange for using their identity (NINO number, bank account). Over the Christmas period he found out that £500 instead of £100 of his pay was kept by the consultant.

Such issues are experienced by both EU and non EU nationals. For example, two residents complained about their employer refusing to send workers home after they declared they were Covid positive following an NHS test. Probably the best known case, which was also published in the local press, was the Chinese restaurant who employed migrants and did not provide them with the minimum wage. The victims endured a lot of abuse before seeking support on migrant forums to travel back to their home country.

European Union Settlement Scheme (EUSS) and eligibility

Applying to the EUSS is mandatory for all EU citizens and their non-EU family members, if they wish to remain in the UK, with a deadline for applying set for 30 June 2021 for those who are resident in the UK by 31 December 2020. For the majority of residents the application process is straightforward, from experience it has taken me less than 15 minutes to apply with access to a mobile phone, internet and good knowledge of English. In York there are two main reasons why people have not applied yet. Firstly, they are not aware of the scheme or did not want to apply and secondly they were lacking the required evidence. In the first category they were residents who:

- had been living in York/the UK for a long time and refused to apply as they found it insulting;
- were not aware that their children also had to apply and were not aware of how to do that;
- had a criminal conviction and were afraid they would be deported and separated from their families;
- had an awareness of the scheme but didn't realise it was compulsory; and
- they decided to return home for good

Secondly, the people who lack evidence proving their eligibility. In the second category I came across residents who:

- do not have a valid passport or ID card (often as they could not leave the country due to lockdown or embassy was closed);
- struggle to provide evidence of their time in the UK (grandmothers who were carers working 'cash in hand', stay at home mothers)
- although many EUSS applicants would not ordinarily need to provide evidence that they are living in the UK and instead can rely on 'automated checks' by providing their National Insurance Number this service was suspended during lockdown
- those who had lack of evidence due to no proof of address in their name (no bank account due to unemployment or living undocumented in shared housing).

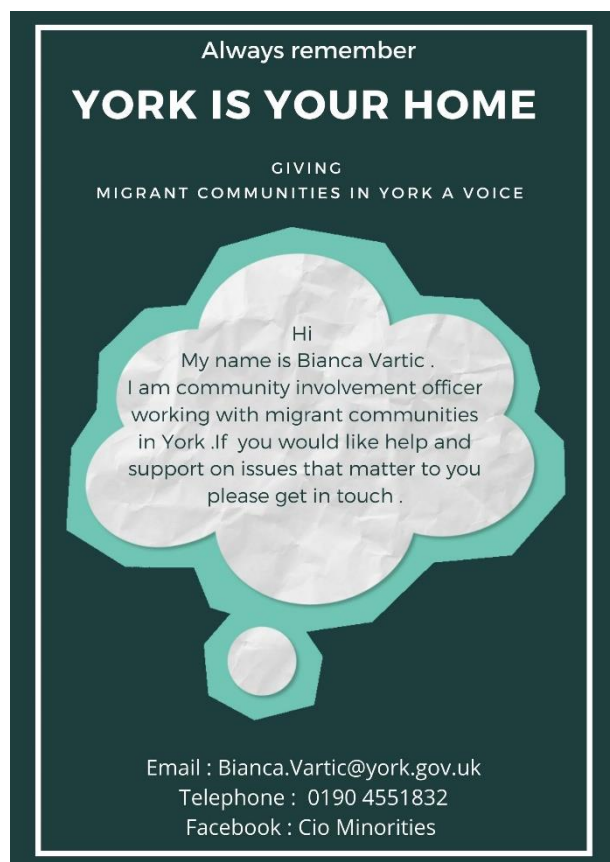
Unfortunately, the numbers of those who fall in these categories are unknown because of a lack of data. There are also other non-EU citizens who may be eligible based on their retained rights or residence (non-EU citizens who had a relationship with an EU citizen in the past

and lived in the UK for a certain period of time). Essentially this means that the total number of people expected to apply to EUSS is not known.

My role in the EU Settlement Scheme has mainly been around promotion and engagement. The Home Office website and leaflet for EU Citizens are translated into multiple languages. Creating a duplication of these with CYC logo would be a waste of resources, therefore in order to promote my services and raise awareness of the scheme I created a simple poster which ultimately enabled me to reach 90% of my clients. I have also received referrals from EU citizens to assist with EUSS applications. These have been signposted to CAY, Kirklees Law Centre and the Law Clinic at York St John University. We have received excellent feedback from clients thanking our partners for their help and assistance. The local residents found CAY staff incredibly welcoming. The MYnority project has also delivered EUSS awareness sessions in West Offices and at Vale of York Academy.

Awareness of the scheme

According to the Home Office Statistics (28 August 2018 to 30 September 2020) 6,470 EU citizens in York have applied or settled



status. Although this is a positive outcome, the Council continues to take steps to improve support and awareness among those who have not yet applied for the scheme. Based on Migration Yorkshire statistics (October 2019) we know that there is still a significant proportion of eligible residents in York who have not yet applied. Since the start of the scheme CYC has delivered several communications packages to get the message out, as well as offering additional support to those who may need help with their application. This includes:

- Dedicated EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS) information and guidance page on our website,

including information about local organisations that are able to provide further support;

- An open letter to York's EU citizens;
- Applied to the Home Office for grant funding to provide support and guidance to EU citizens in York who have not applied to the EU Settlement Scheme (CIO role);
- Basic advice, engagement and signposting: OISC advice provided by our partner organisation CAY. This advice and guidance has been via outreach in community settings (pre-lockdown);
- Community Interpreters training scheme: 10 volunteers trained from specific EU communities in the city. Trained to identify and signpost to agencies;
- Small-scale community drop-in events (Welcome to York) organised and targeted to the migrant communities in the city;
- Training for staff; and
- EUSS Document ID Scanning location. The service is available at Registry Office Services for a fee and CAY (free of charge).

In my opinion because we are targeting often quite vulnerable migrants, there is a need for more training to be made available across the city for social workers, housing officers etc. who come into direct contact with EU citizens and their family members. Finally, I would recommend that CYC register on the Home Office website in order to have better visibility in terms of their support to York migrant community.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/eu-settlement-scheme-community-support-for-vulnerable-citizens/list-of-organisations>

York Hate Crime Action Plan

Migrants are still making York their home. As such, issues of community cohesion and social inclusion have become priority in the last year. While a great deal of xenophobia and racism went largely un-noticed at the start of 'Black Lives Matter' protests, it became impossible to ignore the outbreaks of violence targeted towards the Chinese community when the first Covid-19 case was reported in York. As an attempt to address this a group was set up with key partners was to produce a Hate Crime Action Plan.

A crucial outcome of this work for the city in is a better understanding of the social composition of York and the attitudes of residents towards social diversity. For MYnority York the Hate Crime Action plan means collaboration with partners and communities to advance social cohesion and the integration of migrants in the city. The proposed outcomes

include anti hate crime trainings and an Inclusion Festival that aim to change perceptions of communities towards people from different characteristics.