



Commission for  
Rural Communities

Tackling rural disadvantage

**Rural Migrant  
Worker Projects:**

Bridging Arts and  
West Cornwall

Faith Forum



## Let's Talk!

### Photographs and Faith

### Bringing locals and migrant workers together in West Cornwall

#### Introduction

Cornwall's attractiveness as a place to visit and to live in is legendary. It has long been a destination for holidaymakers, retirees, artists and, more recently, surfers. Equally well known are the facts about the decline of its traditional industries - mining, fishing, and agriculture - the relatively low pay and seasonal nature associated with tourism, the large number of second homes<sup>1</sup>, and the lack of opportunities for some of the county's young people.

To quote from another Commission for Rural Communities' case study<sup>2</sup>, *"Whilst life for most people is, of course, good, the reality for many is different, and largely hidden from view."* This is particularly true of the migrant workers on whom many horticultural and agricultural businesses now depend to harvest their crops, and who are, to the majority, almost invisible members of the rural workforce. Their employment conditions vary hugely, ranging from the professional, as exemplified by Nocton Farms of Camborne, to the wholly unacceptable, as reported recently by the BBC (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/cornwall/4646664.stm> and <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/cornwall/6367511.stm>). This case study tells the story of the work done in West Cornwall to welcome these hard working visitors from overseas, and to help them become part of the local community by overcoming social and language barriers.



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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/publications/crcst04theuseofsecondhomescounciltaxdiscountincornwall>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/publications/crcst31telyawestcornwall>

## Using Art to Break Down Barriers

The work, led by Susan Roberts of bridging arts, a London-based social enterprise, and the Revd. Andrew Yates of the West Cornwall Faith Forum uses art – specifically photographic and graphic art – both to bring locals and visiting workers together, and to raise awareness within and beyond Cornwall about the challenges and benefits associated with our increasing need for workers, from elsewhere in Europe, and beyond, to help bring home the harvest. This is the story of a softly-softly approach that is beginning to produce results of which those involved can be proud.

## The Project, its Work and Achievements

Susan is Cornish, and her brother, Jonathan, a farmer from Praze, West Cornwall, needs migrant workers to harvest his crops, because, quite simply, local people either aren't willing, or aren't available, to do the work – and somebody has to do the work so that the rest of us can buy the produce. Susan's son, George, helped with the potato harvest in 2003, and made friends with some of the workers, many of whom are very over-qualified for the work they do (e.g. gangs have included engineers, a pilot, and medical and dental students). As George's friendships developed, so too did the realization that neither he, nor his uncle or mother, know anything about these people. They were simply a group of workers who arrived and left by bus every day, from where and to where they did not know, and when their work in Cornwall was done they were moved, perhaps to return perhaps not, to Kent or Lincolnshire to meet the next demand for labour. From this, Susan said, grew, *"My determination to find out more about this largely hidden part of English rural life, and to do something that would help integrate these workers into our communities, and our way of life."*

This search led her, via Eunice Walker of ACRE ([www.acre.org.uk](http://www.acre.org.uk)), Ben Rogaly of the University of Sussex ([www.sussex.ac.uk/migration/profile28173.html](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/migration/profile28173.html)), Gerard Crofton-Martin of the Citizens' Advice Bureau ([www.citizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk)), and a three day visit to Cornwall to talk to workers and to take photographs that attempted to capture the essence of migrant working, to the Catholic Church in Camborne where, thanks to the efforts of local Polish congregation member, Ewa Toms, services were being held in Polish. This simple, but very important contribution to the migrant workers' needs for social and spiritual contact, and the ability of faith groups to cut across statutory, voluntary and community boundaries, and to reach out to the marginalised, prompted Susan to contact Andrew Yates to explore how the art and design could be used to help other churches and groups to open their doors to migrant workers.

Andrew already knew of similar work being done by Audrey Carmichael of the Elim Centre in Camborne ([audrey.carmichael@camborne-elim.co.uk](mailto:audrey.carmichael@camborne-elim.co.uk)), and so it was decided, with the Bishop of Truro's full support, and with a grant from the Church Urban Fund ([www.cuf.org.uk](http://www.cuf.org.uk)) and the Diocese of Truro's

Archbishop's Council Mission Fund to produce colourful postcards designed to help communication. Containing simple phrases, such as, "Hello..., how are you?" spelt out phonetically, in English, Polish, and Lithuanian). They are easy to distribute and use, and have proved popular. Similarly, posters and fact sheets about facilities in local towns were also produced to help inform and improve communication and understanding. Two workshops were held, one in Camborne, and one in Penzance, to explain the project, and to hear from others. It was learnt, very early on, that there had to be an emphasis on caution and consultation. All involved realize that the subject is contentious, and at every step advice was taken from, for example, journalists and practitioners, to ensure that the approach was appropriate, and that the messages were constructive. In addition, the advice and help of local authority officers, such as Tony Newson, Penwith District Council's Social Inclusion Officer ([www.penwith.gov.uk](http://www.penwith.gov.uk)) was sought. This approach has enabled objections to be heard, discussed, and dealt with at an early stage, and any obstacles encountered – in truth very few, and none of real significance - overcome.

### **So far, so Good**

The outcome of the work to date is that approximately ten community meetings have been held, support has been given to people, be they from faith groups, or other groups, involved in helping to improve relationships between employers' and employed, and within communities. The project's approach, and its success, is beginning to be noticed both within Cornwall, by the Rural Community Council ([www.cornwallrcc.co.uk](http://www.cornwallrcc.co.uk)) , by Fusion, Cornwall, a diversity project interested in migrant workers ([www.fusion.ypc.org.uk](http://www.fusion.ypc.org.uk)), and by the Eden project ([www.edenproject.com](http://www.edenproject.com)), and also beyond Cornwall. For example, letters of support have been received from Defra, from MPs, and from the Archbishop of Canterbury.

## Summary

**Lets' Talk!** is a project designed to help integrate migrant workers into their host communities in West Cornwall. The project uses photographs and posters to show the reality of life for migrant workers, and postcards with everyday phrases in English and other languages to help people talk to one another. Working with colleagues in the West Cornwall Faith Forum, church and other community groups are beginning to break down barriers and to bring people together. Susan and her colleagues are now exploring how to develop the approach and to encourage its adoption elsewhere. For the present, however, the team are pleased with progress, and proud of the fact that they have helped to give migrant workers a helping hand and a warm welcome to Cornwall.

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