

Migrant Stories – Final Report for Carnegie UK Trust
March 2008

Project Summary

An action research project to demonstrate the use of accessible, creative digital technologies to foster understanding, strengthen community cohesion and networks, and inform planning processes among decision makers.

We have been training and supporting members of both host and migrant communities to produce digital stories – 2-minute audio-visual clips for DVD and websites - and building a skills and interest pool and establishing a range of innovative mechanisms for their exchange and distribution.

Migrant Stories is rural, ultra local and based upon positive initiatives that are already occurring in Herefordshire, namely village friendship groups and church-based groups and Herefordshire Council and West Mercia Police's Diversity initiatives. It focuses on culture and cultural histories, on the assumption that many of the 25,000 workers, who annually live in Herefordshire have more in common with their host communities than is generally understood. For instance, many migrant workers come to work in rural counties from marginal agricultural backgrounds, and are already familiar with or skilled in the farm work they are doing in the UK.

This Report follows the **Methodology and Timeframe** in order to show how the project developed against our original intentions. It draws together the findings for publication, accompanied by a booklet and DVD, aimed at other communities to use in community development initiatives with migrant workers.

Convene Support Group

Community members and council officers were approached during the early stages of the project. Membership: Vicar of Marden, Vicar of Leominster Moravian Church, a Polish British citizen and a Polish migrant worker, a Village Friendship Group organizer, West Mercia Police Diversity Officer, Herefordshire Council Race Equality Officer, ESOL/Help language group organizer and the Project Coordinator and Project Director.

We met formally only three times as a group, but the group itself has established a broad network of informal contacts and has proved invaluable over the life of the project, by:_

- Providing contacts with seasonal and migrant workers in Herefordshire
- Using already existing friendship groups to recruit volunteers for the project
- Disseminating information about the project to further contacts
- Giving essential word of mouth support to the project
- Facilitating visits to employers
- Coordinating with Herefordshire Strategic Partnership - County Council, Primary Care Trust and Police initiatives
- Finding translators
- Giving informed feedback and perspective on the range and content of digital stories produced
- Offering ideas and contacts for local dissemination screenings
- Developing a joint strategy for dealing with press and TV interest

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Commission Training Consultant

A technical specification was established early on in the project.

- Apple laptops using the following software: iMovie to construct stories, Photoshop to edit photographs, Sound Studio to edit audio recordings.
- Digital cameras to take any additional photographs that were needed by participants.
- Portable scanners to scan any photographs belonging to participants.
- Sony minidisk recorders to record participants' audio.

We required that equipment be lightweight, quick to set up in any location and very simple to use.

Recruit Project Coordinator

Before devising workshops, it became clear we needed to find out what was happening on the ground in Herefordshire. We needed to know more about what time and commitment migrant workers might be able to make to the project and also what sort of stories they might wish to tell. We needed someone on the ground in the local community, meeting people and speaking to potential volunteers. Bill Laws, a trusted and experienced community journalist, who has a long track-record with Rural Media, was keen to take this project on. His starting point was to generate a short project description/publicity leaflet, whilst also meeting members of the Support Group and following up their contacts and suggestions.

Devise digital stories workshop programme

The initial contact research done by Bill Laws proved invaluable, not least because it established a network of contacts, which he has been able to return to throughout the project. Initially, he found interest and willingness to take part, both from migrants and hosts, but it became clear that regular weekly workshops would not suit, due to the stresses and strains of migrants' working lives.

The rural aspect is a crucial barrier for many migrant workers. Unpredictable weather can mean work patterns change at short notice for agricultural seasonal workers, resulting in penury and a decision to return home or plenty of cash, with which to go sightseeing. In addition, changing shift patterns, lack of knowledge of their rights, lack of resources, reliance on infrequent rural public transport can make commitment to regular classes/course difficult. Running classes with people speaking 3 or 4 different languages is also impractical.

This is a very important aspect of doing practical work on issues of ethnicity – migrants are not a homogeneous group – in fact differences between them are often greater than between them and the indigenous community. However, it is precisely the differences between them, which make their digital stories so fascinating and revealing.

Trainers Workshop/recruiting media workers

Our workshop practice was devised to be as flexible as possible. We wanted to avoid people telling long stories, which then require editing, which they might struggle with the technical aspects and lose interest. The finished stories needed to be short and engaging for a variety of audiences. It was decided that Bill Laws would support each individual to choose their story carefully and then record a 2-minute version.

Our chosen media workers would need to work in various locations and often in the evenings. They had to be capable of supporting each volunteer to do the voice recording, find suitable photographs to illustrate their story and then

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assemble the story on a MAC laptop. Finding the right media workers is critical. They need to be friendly and easy-going, able to encourage and to show people with no media experience how to use the kit, but equally, capable of ensuring that technical standards for recordings and editing are met. The Rural Media Company had not long completed a digital stories project with Gypsies and Travellers and we were able to use the workers and experience gained on that project.

Set up Reporting Mechanisms

Bill Laws kept a weekly diary of contacts, events and his observations. Jane Jackson had regular progress reports from Bill and visited workshops to video the process of digital storytelling for the final report and DVD.

Recruiting Participants and Running Workshops

Now that we had a good range of contacts with hosts and migrants and our media team in place, we were in a position to run some pilot sessions to test our digital story methods and, at the same time, to find out how they worked with non-English speakers. Our first sessions were with a group of Russian students, here for summer strawberry picking. Held in the evenings a pub and then at Rural Media's office, with some translation support from an ex strawberry picker, who had stayed on from the previous summer, the workshops showed that our methodology was working. They recorded their stories in Russian, (a rough translation on paper was made at the same time) and, with very little English between them, they quickly picked up how to use the laptop to make a story, which they were satisfied with.

Subsequently, we were able to respond to any group of migrants or hosts who wanted to take part. We ran workshops based on both formal and informal friendship groups, fitting sessions in at nearby venues – a pub, our own offices after work, a friendship group member's house, a church hall, a place of employment, a volunteer centre, and the apartment of a Polish migrant worker – sometimes giving lifts, using the Rural Media minibus or paying for transport to enable participant's involvement.

Making the Stories

In group or workshop settings, individual stories arose partly through the individual's reflection on his or her situation, and partly through the interaction of the group ('You must tell it like that'). Each person was invited to record their story in the language of their choice: most chose English although it was the second language of fifteen of the (twenty) contributors.

No-one refused to record a story and everyone signed a consent form. One Bulgarian woman had to abandon her story when, after failing to earn enough money because of bad weather, she was forced to return home; a Russian student was arbitrarily transferred to another farm in the middle of his story; and the Polish husband of a migrant dentist failed to finish his after he was recruited as the (first) Polish Community Support Officer for West Mercia Police.

Recording each story typically involved ten sessions, which varied between 1.5 and 3 hours each: an introduction session followed by three sessions to firm up the story; one to record the story; two to collect and assemble images (several individuals used our digital cameras to illustrate their stories); two sessions to synchronise images with sound track; and a final session to review the digital story. No-one completed a story in under ten sessions. Older contributors, including 83-year-old Eddie Dzierza, took longer. However several younger individuals also took longer because, on reflection, they wanted to amend or re-edit their story.

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Despite concerns that a re-edit could detract or even 'spoil' a story we co-operated with the contributor's wishes. This added a certain tension to test screenings of the stories.

Pilot Screenings at Local Agencies

As the final stories are being completed and prepared for the DVD, we have run some pilot screenings to gauge the reaction to the stories and their potential contribution to community cohesion issues around migration working.

Preliminary offers to screen stories at appropriate events were unsuccessful: agendas were full, time was short. But persuading key individuals to view a sample story on a laptop at their place of work promptly opened doors. Key individuals included a migrant worker specialist with West Mercia Police, a diversity officer with Herefordshire Council, a primary school head teacher, a Primary Care Trust health manager with responsibility for migrant workers, and the organiser of a Diocesan project on migrant working.

Public Screenings

This led to public screenings, slotted in to existing agendas at the Migrants Network for Hereford Diocese (12 attendees) and Herefordshire Information Research Network (HIRN) (60 attendees, mostly local authority officers from Herefordshire, Worcestershire and Shropshire). The primary school head (where the local population doubles during the fruit picking season) felt the material was difficult for her children. However the village local history society has booked a screening and a local secondary school is hosting a morning of sessions with our digital stories and some of the migrant workers who made them.

As selection of our digital stories was presented at a research seminar in Grantham, hosted by East Midlands Development Agency (EMDA) on 17th October 2007. "Distant Voices – Migrant Workers, Representation and the Arts" was run by Culture East Midlands and attended by 60 people (policy makers, planners, artists, creative entrepreneurs and those working in cultural services, economic development or rural affairs).

Response to Stories

The response to the Stories has been encouraging. At the Grantham seminar, they were very well received and clearly demonstrated the value of bringing varied, personal stories of migrants and host communities to a wider audience of service providers and policy makers. At the HIRN meeting, delegates spontaneously applauded Story 7 (below); at the Church Network meeting people were visibly moved by the story of Stasia, a 60-year-old Polish woman (Story 15). At HIRN one delegate remarked that the stories could represent 'the authentic voice' of migrant workers – since getting migrant workers to attend council events was usually impossible.

We are now holding two further pilot screenings in a secondary school, and a local history society and gathering information on how the stories can best be used.

Digital Stories Output

1. Roddy's Story – The car salesman

An unexpected surprise for the local car dealer.

2. Ina and Rita's Story – The shopkeepers

Three Lithuanians come to the rescue of the village store.

3. Irina's Story – The runaway. (Russian with sub titles).

A happy ending for a young Russian who ran away from the strawberry fields and found temporary work in café.

4. Eddie's Story – The refugee.

The extraordinary journey of an 83-year-old Polish migrant worker

5. Monika's Story – Isolation.

A young teacher copes with the loneliness of the new arrival.

6. Andrey's Story – Me and my car. (Russian with sub titles).

Tractor driver Andrey's ambition is to save enough money to buy his dream car.

7. Kath & Joyce's Story – The hokey-cokey

A visit to Lithuania for two women who set up a migrant workers support group.

8. Natasha's Story – English food. (Russian with sub titles).

A seasonal fruit picker pines for some proper food from home.

9. Emilia's Story – The mother. (Bulgarian with sub titles).

An older women explains why she left her family at home to work in Britain.

10. Kirill's Story – the foreign student.

A Russian explains why his English friends are so important.

11. Peter's Story – The portrait

A widowed RAF pilot finds friendship and support from Dezzie and Emilia and is touched by the portrait of himself, painted by Dezzie.

12. Tanya's Story - My foreign friends. (Russian with sub titles).

A young Russian woman breaks down the language barrier to befriend some Bulgarians.

13. Neil's Story – The fruit farmer

A fruit farmer reveals how guest workers are essential to his business.

14. Serge's Story – The drummer. (Russian with sub titles).

A Russian student explains why he has taken the summer off to come to Britain . . . and practice his music in between shifts in the strawberry fields.

15. Stasia's Story – Polish and proud.

The first English words this ex-NHS nurse hears as a child are: dirty Pole. Now, she says, she's hearing those words again.

16. Egor's Story – The fruit picker. (Russian with sub titles)

Bad weather and no work pose a problem for this young Russian.

17. Arek's Story – Polish dumplings

A café chef reveals a family secret.

18. Milan Zapalac – The race attack.

After custodial sentences are handed out to his attackers, A Czech driver reflects on why he was victimised.

Story Completion/Quality Checks

We are now engaged on the final technical stage of the project - checking the sound levels and picture quality, getting some of the stories translated so they can be sub-titled, and building a DVD interface to present the stories.

Edit Video report

A short video record of the project has been kept and will be edited to show the various stages/processes of this project and will be available as part of the DVD. We have also recorded some vox pops in market towns – often expressions of resentment at migrant workers presence in the County – and some of these will be included on the final DVD, along with contextualising statements from Herefordshire Council's Diversity Team.

Dissemination

At present we are working on a local and regional dissemination strategy, advised by the outcomes of local screenings and advice from diversity professionals as to how it can be used. Migrant digital stories can shown in combinations for different audiences, presenting multi-faceted insights to rural life, and, we hope to demonstrate, are excellent for use in secondary schools, at meetings, presentations and conferences and as digital appendices to reports and proposals. In this way the voice of the rural migrant worker is heard more effectively and dialogue becomes not only the key to community cohesion and to counter poorly

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informed media messages, but will critically inform evidence of need to win public and political support for services which are fit for future purpose.

As far as possible we want to stay in touch with the migrant workers, who have taken part in this project, and involve them in the dissemination – attending and speaking at some screenings. They will each have their own copy of the final DVD to keep and disseminate themselves if and when they return home. Websites will play a large part in our strategy – we are looking into making a web showcase for the stories, so that they are accessible to anyone on-line. We plan a big launch screening at the local arts centre, The Courtyard, during the Borderlines (rural) Film Festival, which means the screening will be publicised in their brochure to 15,000 people in the Marches area.

General Observations

People are very interested in the activity, which this project offers them. Telling a personal story, having the support to edit and illustrate, causes them to reflect on their situation and their opinions and offers them some considerable satisfaction on completing it.

Equally, people, who have not been involved in the project, are very interested to watch the stories and are surprised by what they discover. The stories are so different – in voice tone, sentiment, atmosphere, values, the way people express themselves – as well as the stories content itself. Migrants are not a homogeneous group and the digital stories form gives voice to that, succinctly and very accessibly.

Press coverage

With Migrant Workers rarely out of the news during the summer and autumn of the project, we were approached by a Birmingham Sunday newspaper wanting to illustrate one of the more negative reports on the effect of migration to the UK. The Sunday Mercury was persuaded instead to feature Ina and Rita, two hardworking Lithuanians who had reopened a village store. Apart from the headline ('Migrant Millionaires') the coverage was fair and balanced, and picked up by a regional BBC news team which, with guidance from the project, covered the same story for an early news feature. We are hoping that BBC Hereford and Worcester will also carry some of the completed stories on-line when the project is finished.

Jane Jackson

5th December 2007