

PERSIAN MINISTRY DEVELOPMENT

PROGRESS UPDATE FEBRUARY 2023

INTRODUCTION

The Persian Ministry Development project started in August 2021, whilst the covid pandemic was still impacting church and other activities. Evolving plans for the project had already been discussed with stakeholders for some time. This report summarises progress to date in Hull, Doncaster and Sheffield against the originally planned programme of activities. It also sets out some suggestions for priorities over the coming year.

It also recaps the five year objectives of the project, and gives an early indication of progress towards these. We are still in the early stages of a project intended to develop capacity and local leadership. As is often observed with development programmes less is visible after one year than would be hoped, but more happens within three years than was expected.

As noted below, this project has operated with a relatively low profile as we emerged from covid and established routines. Because we are ministering alongside vulnerable people we need to be careful in identifying individuals, but are keen to share stories of what is now starting to happen. The number of people waiting asylum decisions continues to grow, to put pressure on economically challenged neighbourhoods, and to be a subject of political controversy.



Christmas 2022 – Hull, Doncaster and Sheffield

ACTIVITIES

Focus	Planned actions	Progress	Potential next steps
TRUSTED ORGANISATION <i>improve networking/signposting</i>	<p>Build relationships with governmental/third sector organisations, demonstrating our cultural understanding/track record/integrity/provision of supportive host church and Persian community.</p> <p>Enables them to signpost people expressing interest in joining a church group towards us</p>	<p>Developed relationship with City of Sanctuary (co-ordinating charity of asylum support in Sheffield). Arman has provided some volunteer interpretation for CoSS and visits the weekly multi-agency drop in. Our new Sheffield group meets next door to CoSS.</p> <p>Now joining Open Doors drop in sessions at Princes Avenue Methodist Church in Hull most weeks, offering translation support. Bible studies follow on from this.</p> <p>Built networks with leaders of other churches working with Iranians in Sheffield (Cemetery Road Baptist, Christ Church Central) and Hull. Arman offers occasional Bible studies. We are alert to ecumenical relationships sometimes being complex due to differences in theology or churches feeling they are “in competition” with each other.</p> <p>In Hull one of our Iranian worshippers has been asked if we could provide activities for asylum seekers with children. Whether or not we are able to meet this request, it is an affirmation that what we offer is respected.</p>	<p>Develop relationship with charities and agencies supporting asylum seekers and other churches in Doncaster.</p>
HONEST IMMIGRATION SUPPORT <i>increase effectiveness, efficiency of support</i>	<p>Respond pro-actively with support for asylum claims/appeals, often including confirmation of risk due to Christian faith. Provide letters and attend court cases as necessary.</p> <p>We have learnt what UK Visa & Immigration need to know, but take care not to make unverifiable claims about faith, stating only what we have observed.</p> <p>Only offer baptism on completion of baptism courses (own</p>	<p>Requests for letters of support and court appearances have reduced compared to previous levels. We understand this being due to increasing delays in the asylum process.</p> <p>Where letters have been requested in Hull, Arman has providing information to Rev Randall Barlow to write these, In Doncaster with there currently being no minister in place Arman has written letters himself.</p> <p>Great care is being taken to ensure that baptism classes in both Doncaster and Hull are not rushed and that applicants have an appreciation of the faith they wish to be baptised into. Those who have</p>	<p>A sustainable plan is needed for when Randall retires, and we need to be alert to these letters taking up increasing amounts of time.</p>

Focus	Planned actions	Progress	Potential next steps
	language/translated), regular attendance/participation.	been baptised through the project (12 in Hull, 4 in Doncaster) have remained engaged with us afterwards.	
ONGOING LEARNING & DISCIPLESHIP <i>allow regular teaching in Farsi, by staff, then Persian local preachers</i>	<p>Weekly study sessions, recognising that people may be keen to explore/have a strong faith, but lack inherited knowledge of Bible/Christian theology.</p> <p>Teaching has generally been from English-speaking ministers/preachers with translation</p>	<p>Bible studies in Hull have recovered from very small numbers after covid. We are now providing a Bible study plus a separate baptism class each week in both Doncaster and Hull. The majority of those attending are exploring Christianity. Membership classes are also being held for some people who we have baptised.</p> <p>One to one mentoring has been provided to one of our Farsi worshippers in Hull so that he can start to lead baptism classes.</p> <p>Bible studies follow a clear methodology of observation leading to interpretation leading to application. Written Farsi teaching notes are provided for each study. Where studies are being led by others, Arman reviews their notes prior to the studies to ensure the quality of what is being offered and to teach the teacher.</p> <p>A new Bible study has been started in central Sheffield (see below).</p> <p>Arman made contact with Highfield Trinity Methodist Church in Sheffield in 2021, but there did not seem interest from Iranians worshipping there at the time to engage in midweek Farsi activities. We understand that new Iranians continue to join the congregation and will explore opportunities to partner with the new midweek work at 35 Chapel Walk.</p> <p>Quality of teaching seems to be appreciated in Doncaster, Hull and Sheffield.</p>	<p>Continue to train and support Bible study leaders.</p> <p>Test recording teaching so this can be used in more than one location or re-used</p>
DISTINCTIVE INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP <i>develop lay leadership, Methodist Way of Life as tool for ongoing discipleship</i>	<p>Through instruction, worship, modelled behaviour we teach Methodist understanding of Christian leadership.</p> <p>e.g. importance of consultative decision-making & lay leadership, equality of women</p>	<p>In Hull leadership development has focussed on one to one mentoring. Whilst we are seeing an eagerness to learn, Arman is taking care to focus on helping new Christians develop and sustain spiritual habits before pushing people into leadership roles – the parable of the sower is important for this ministry. Arman’s own testimony as an asylum seeker has been important here.</p>	

Focus	Planned actions	Progress	Potential next steps
	Often requires taking great care not to inadvertently reinforce models of religious leadership previously subjected to under repressive regimes	In Doncaster there is an Iranian leadership team that meets monthly with Arman. All of the team members have been Christians for at least four years. We continue to face challenges of lack of housing and employment for people who have been granted leave to remain, meaning that some potential leaders have been forced to relocate to larger cities.	
OWN LANGUAGE WORSHIP <i>facilitate sharing of worship resources, Persian worship leaders/preachers</i>	Weekly opportunities for people to worship in their own language. Could be a separate Farsi/other language or truly multi-lingual worship Already built resource bank of Farsi-language worship songs	In Hull Arman is now involved in worship approximately twice per month, attending worship planning on these weeks. Worship generally includes one Farsi song each week. Some Iranians who have been baptised have taken part in leading of worship Farsi worship is held in Doncaster each week. There are a few members who can lead worship, and a couple who are starting to preach. Outside preachers are also invited for when Arman is not present. Attendance has recovered post covid to around 30, with a stable core and regular new worshippers. Attempts to use Methodist resources for training of preachers and worship leaders have been frustrating. The hoped for partnership with UMC Germany did not transpire, due to changes in personnel and strategy in UMC Germany. We have continued to discuss with UK Local Preachers Office how training materials and preacher accreditation could be adapted for Farsi worship. At present there does not seem to be flexibility within the system or funding to develop this. We may in time need to develop our own training resources.	In Hull, preaching is usually in English – could we develop a pattern of translation to allow Farsi speakers to more fully engage, initially on Sundays when Arman is present Sharing of Doncaster Farsi worship resources to Hull does not seem to have been as straightforward as had been anticipated. Create shareable printed/ electronic resources with both Farsi and English translations e.g. baptism, membership, prayers, music.
HOST CHURCH <i>support host churches in being even better hosts, understanding cultural differences</i>	Persian Methodists have own identity, but are attached to host church.	Arman has spoken at Hull circuit service, and has been invited to circuit staff meetings, although diary complications has made this difficult. However the profile of the project could be higher in all three circuits and both Districts.	Share testimony from the project in all circuits and districts – at relevant meetings,

Focus	Planned actions	Progress	Potential next steps
	Provides stability/practical support, also opportunities for cross-cultural sharing, welcome, integration.	Currently we do not have a representative from Doncaster on the steering group	newsletters and via social media. Recruit Doncaster steering group member Develop training for host congregations/ circuits e.g. on understanding Islam
GATHERING & CELEBRATION <i>create regional/national Methodist gathering</i>	Local social gatherings, travelling for regional/national conferences/celebrations are important features of Persian culture. Congregations hold periodic social/fellowship gatherings, often attended by community beyond the regular congregation/who have left the immediate area	A successful Christmas lunch was held in Hull, and Iranian new year will be celebrated. Soup lunches between Open Doors drop in and Bible studies are an important bridge. More regular meals in Hull would be beneficial in attracting new people and building community, but availability of premises and volunteers could be limiting factors. In Doncaster fellowship meals are held each month, attracting people beyond the congregation.	Develop more food based activities in Hull Organise a larger scale conference/ celebration in 2023.
INFECTIOUS INVITATION	Members are keen to share faith they have discovered. Some have developed secure methods of secretly relaying recording of services to friends and family in Iran.	We continue to see regular new people attending Bible studies in Hull and Doncaster. Doncaster Bible studies are joined remotely by some people in Iran. People have also joined our new Sheffield group through invitation.	Explore opportunities to engage with the increasing numbers of asylum seekers in hotels.
PASTORAL SUPPORT <i>improve pastoral systems</i>	Complex pastoral/mental health needs inherent in communities built largely of refugees Congregations and local ministers provide pastoral support as required.		
CONNEXION & NETWORK	Members of our congregations often relocate within the UK, breaking links to supportive Christian community	A national network of Methodists ministering with Iranians has started with a first Zoom meeting in December 2022.	

Focus	Planned actions	Progress	Potential next steps
<i>create systems/networks to link people into a new church, including launching new Methodist Persian congregations</i> <i>create recognised network of Methodist Persian congregations able to support each other with preaching, common challenges; but also each relating to supportive local geographical circuits.</i>	(involuntary moves by UKVI/ in search of work)	<p>In spring 2022 Arman began a Bible study group in Sheffield with two Iranians who had previously been engaging with our Doncaster congregation. They arranged a Christmas dinner and invited friends, which has led to more people joining the Bible study, including someone who previously worshipped with us in Hull.</p> <p>This emerging new Christian community is now meeting in the church-owned shop unit at 35 Chapel Walk, next to City of Sanctuary. It is preceded by a community drop in for Iranians.</p> <p>Arman has attended the Church Planting Intensive course to help with developing this new community.</p>	

OUTCOMES

Through these activities we set out to achieve the following long term outcomes over a five year period:

Nurturing disciples Persian Methodists equipped to take up self-renewing leadership of congregations: hence better equipped to speak of Christ to others in their communities, continue to grow as disciples.

Outcome	Progress
Discipling Persian Christians/enquirers, through culturally-informed own-language studies	High quality Bible studies, but reliant on Ministry Enabler
Identify/train/mentor leaders from within Persian fellowships	Starting to identify and mentor some potential leaders, in Doncaster some preachers Leadership team meeting regularly in Doncaster
pathways to be in Connexion with wider Methodism	Not yet developed
Create trusted networks of churches to assist relocation within UK	Not yet developed, but some relational links

Equipping hosts English-speaking Methodists become excellent hosts to Persian and other new language-specific communities of believers, supporting nurturing of disciples

Outcome	Progress
Preachers, ministers, leaderships of English-speaking churches trained to respond to those whose prior experience of region is imposition by oppressive fundamentalist organisations/nation states	Not yet started
Churches equipped to better support claimants through asylum processes	Currently reliant on Ministry Enabler
Churches/circuits supported in starting new outreach to asylum-seeking communities	Not yet applicable

Integrated kingdom work Methodism better able to support Persian Christians within/beyond our congregations, bring Methodist insights as historically lay-led marginal movement to ecumenical conversations

Outcome	Progress
Starting national Methodist Persian fellowship/network	Initial meeting
Create culturally appropriate/robust/pragmatic governance structures for Persian congregations/communities, compatible with Methodist ecclesiology	Not yet applicable
Bring strong authentic Methodist voice to ecumenical conversations	Starting to be recognised as a valued local partner

Birthing new communities Impact: increased access to gospel for people that our experience tells will be keen to hear

Outcome	Progress
New Persian Methodist communities launched, with supportive host churches, most likely initially in Sheffield	Good early progress in Sheffield

Preparing for sustainable growth long term benefit from fixed term investment

Outcome	Progress
Lessons learned from this project transferable to other local migrant communities, e.g. Roma	Not yet applicable
Fixed-term role strengthens & equips local English-speaking and Persian Methodists to continue to develop	Not yet applicable

STEERING GROUP

The Persian Ministry Development Steering Group currently comprises Rev Leslie Newton (Chair of Yorkshire North & East District), Neil Harland (Mission Enabler, Sheffield District), Rev Randall Barlow (Hull Centre & West Circuit), Peter Vince (Hull Centre & West Circuit), Deacon Jackie Wright (Sheffield Circuit).

FINANCES

The table below shows only confirmed funding towards the project. Whilst we anticipated from the start that the project would likely need five years to embed change, different bodies are able to commit funding for different periods of time. We will discuss future funding needs at the time of the next report. The steering group remain grateful for the essential support of all financial contributors.

31 Dec 2022	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	Total
	Actual	Actual	Forecast	Forecast	Forecast	Forecast	
	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
CONFIRMED FUNDING							
Yorkshire North & East District		15,333	15,333	15,334			46,000
Sheffield District		12,000	12,000	12,000	12,000	12,000	60,000
Sheffield Circuit	14,000		0				14,000
Princes Avenue Methodist Church		3,333	3,333	3,334			10,000
Hull (Centre & West) Circuit		3,333	3,333	3,334			10,000
Doncaster (1)		10,546	10,000	10,000	10,000		40,546
TMCP	15,000						15,000
Other funders	1,000		0				1,000
	30,000	44,545	43,999	44,002	22,000	12,000	196,546
EXPENDITURE							
Salary	2,050	31,299	32,089	34,602	35,986	37,426	
NIC		3,480	3,507	3,520	3,661	3,807	
Pension		1,539	1,925	2,076	2,159	2,245	
Travel		3,940	6,400	6,400	6,400	6,400	
Other event costs			1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	
Other		671	1,177	2,537	2,537	2,537	
	2,050	40,929	46,098	50,135	51,743	53,415	
Surplus/ (deficit)	27,950	3,616	-2,099	-6,133	-29,743	-41,415	
Balance carried forward	27,950	31,566	29,467	23,334	-6,409	-47,824	

Note 1: In addition to these costs, Doncaster Circuit incurred £9,454 in 2020/21 covering the cost of the previous lay worker role whilst recruitment of this new role took longer than originally anticipated.