



Conwy & Denbighshire
Community Safety Partnership

NWEN North Wales Race Equality Network
Rhwydwaith Cydraddoldeb Hiliol Gogledd Cymru

Conwy Drop in Centre



April 2009 – March 2010

Fatima Grzesiak

Produced by the North Wales Race Equality Network



The Conwy Borough Drop in Centre

Aim:

To provide equality of access to information and services for individuals and workers from outside the UK.

Target Groups :

- Migrant workers
- Contract workers
- Refugees
- Overseas students
- Resident BME population
- Open door policy

Issues Addressed:

- Language barriers
- Lack of understanding of legislation and official documents
- Housing
- Access to local services e.g. education, health, employment agencies

Information and Access to: -

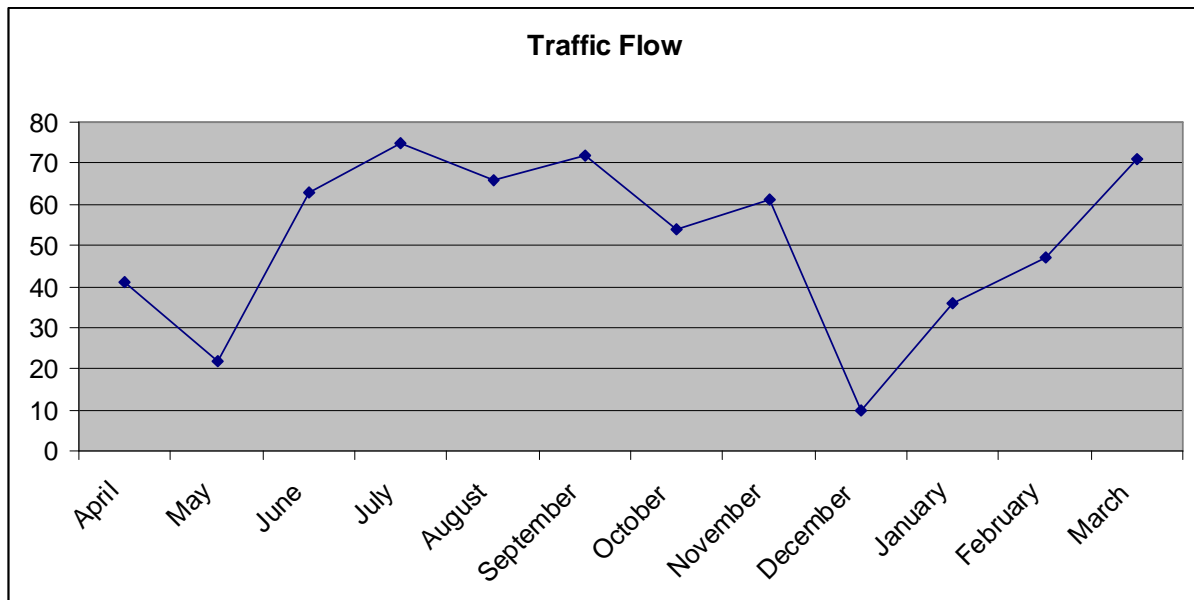
- Language Classes
- Translation
- Training
- Legal Advice
- TUC
- Public Services: - Housing, Health, Education
- Case Worker
- Victim Support
- Domestic abuse reporting & support
- Race hate victim support
- Health & Safety
- Immigration Advisory Service

Llandudno Drop in Centre

The Drop-in Centre has received funding from Conwy Borough Council and Conwy & Denbighshire Community Safety Partnerships to support its activity from April 2009 to March 2010. During this time the project worker has dealt with 618 enquiries - on average 13 enquiries per 6 hour session. Statistically a client was dealt with every 27 minutes of an average session day.

As can be seen from the chart below client traffic increased significantly from May to July. During the summer season there was only a slight decrease in demand for the service in July and August - worth noting - especially when compared to previous year when there was a much greater fall in the number of clients during the holiday season. The only visible dip in demand can be accounted for by closure during the Christmas period. The Drop in Centre enjoyed a continuous increase in demand in February and March.

Figure 1 - Client Traffic Flow



The Drop in Centre has addressed a great deal of important issues voiced by a huge variety of clients coming from many different countries. The majority of queries (Fig. 2) have been from Polish clients (32%), the next biggest groups of enquiries have been those made by the UK citizens (8%), followed by a considerable number of clients from India (7%), Philippines (4%), Pakistan (3%). This year 4% of clients asked to be referred to as citizens of Wales – it is significant as the Drop in Centre also receives phone enquiries from other parts of the UK. The number of Polish enquiries decreased, in the previous year it was 40% compared to 32% in 2009/2010. Similarly there was a decrease in the enquiries made by the UK citizens from 17% in 2008/2009 to 8%. Given the significant number of 62 nationalities (41 in 2008/2009 period) this decrease reflects a greater diversification of the national and ethnic origin of the Drop in clients.

Figure 2a. Main countries of origin

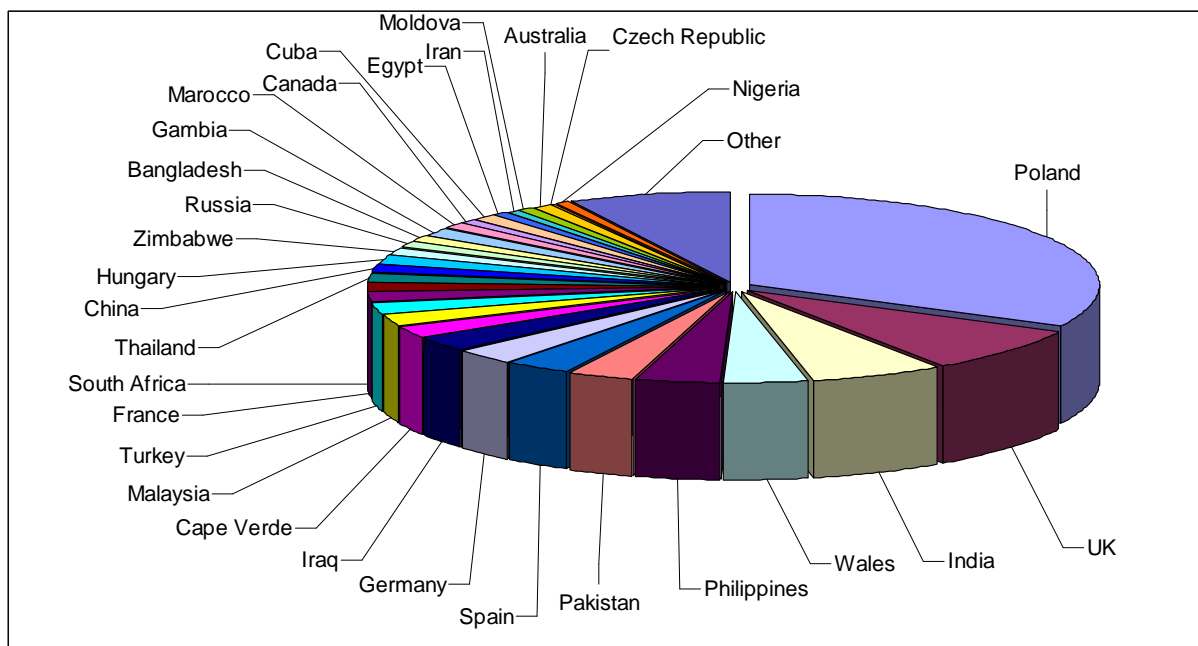
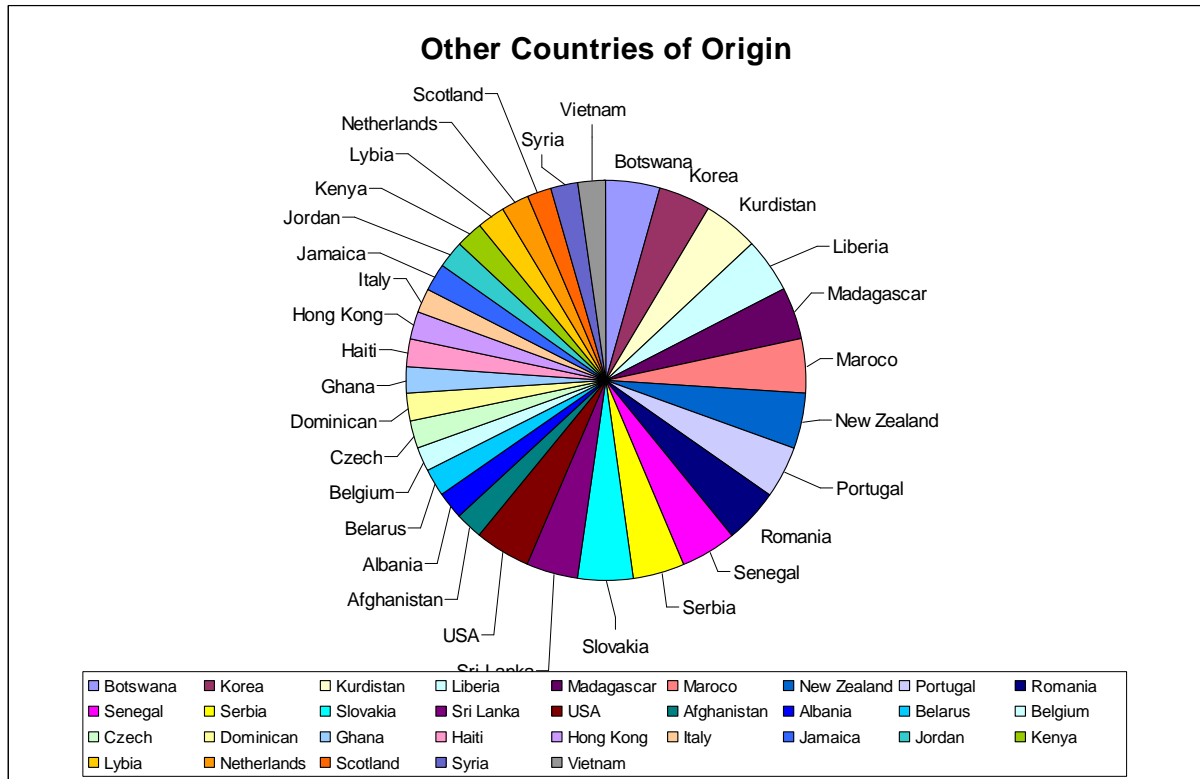
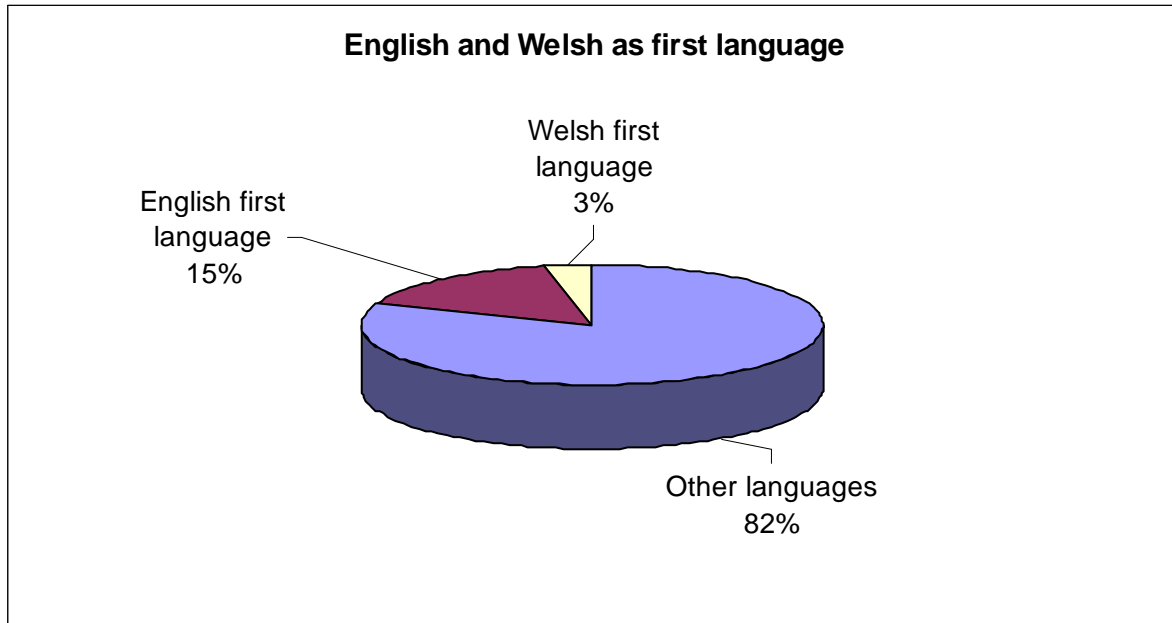


Figure 2 b. Other countries of origin



One of the anomalies in considering enquiries from UK nationals is that a high percentage of the enquiries will relate to spouses, partners and children who may or may not be currently be living in the UK. Spouses and dependents are likely to have separate ethnicities which will not appear in our statistics.

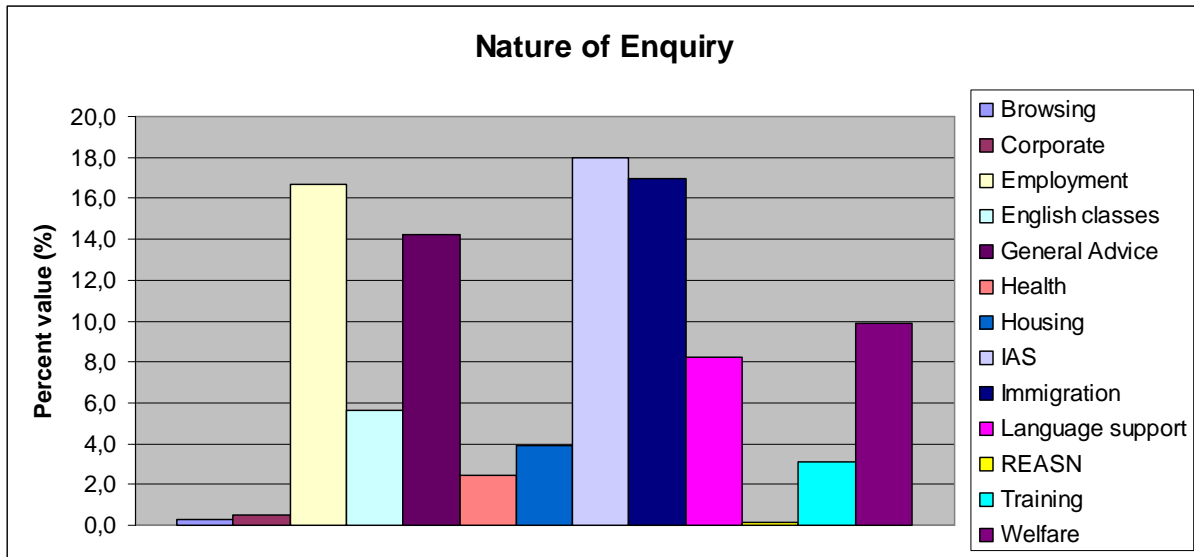
Figure 3 – English & non-English speaking clients



When asked, 82% of clients responded that they did not speak English as their first language. As the project worker is Polish, she is able to assist clients who speak in a variety of Eastern European languages including: Polish, Czech, Slovak and Russian. There is however a much wider variety of languages spoken by clients of the Drop in Centre. As a network NWREN has the capability to support many other languages spoken e.g. Urdu, Gujarati, Hindi, Cantonese, Tagalog & Kurdish etc.

A total of 64 languages were spoken by the Drop in Centre clients between April 2009 and March 2010. For the purpose of accuracy Figure 5 takes into consideration all those clients for whom English is not the first language, including Welsh speakers. Many clients of the Drop in Centre spoke more than two languages thereby contributing to the linguistic diversity of the region

Figure 6 - Nature of enquiry



Enquiries have been grouped into a number of categories including general advice, language support, welfare, health, REASN (Race hate support), employment matters, housing enquiries and training.

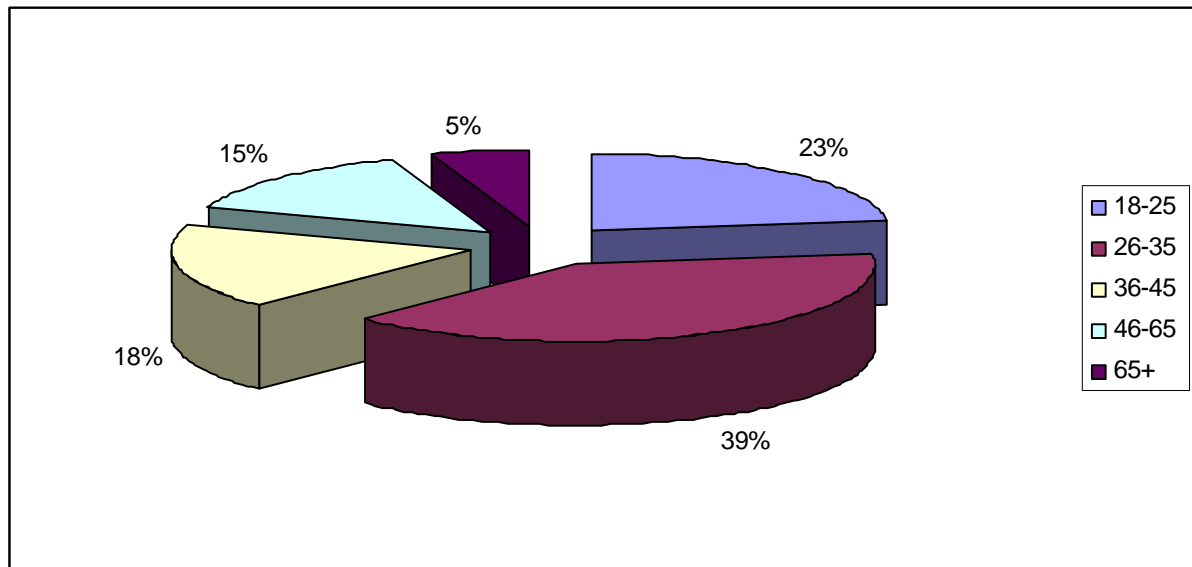
In general the majority of enquiries were regarding Immigration Advice (18%), Employment (16,7%) Housing (17%), General advice (14,2%) as well as language Welfare (9,9 %) and Language support (8,3%). Support also included help in a whole range of other issues ranging from queries about the Workers Registration Scheme, assistance in opening a bank account, requests for information about how to obtain a National Insurance Number, driving licence enquiries, access to libraries as well as other sometimes serious and complex matters related to employment disputes.

Disputes with landlords, and in particular problems with obtaining tenancy agreements have also been dealt with frequently as a significant 17% enquiries were about housing. Clients often sought advice about responsibility for repairs in rented homes, expectations of landlords' duties and issues related to their period of notice. Some tenants appeared unaware of the requirement to pay Council tax and were confused with the concept.

Clients often needed language support (8.3%) and help in translating documents such as: contracts of employment, letters from HM Revenue and Customs, tenancy

agreements, letters from Department of Work and Pensions. Language support also included assistance with writing letters to employers, agencies or landlords. Most language support was provided immediately. However, some translations due to their complexity were referred to NWREN and where appropriate avail themselves of modern technology and the support of NWREN employees.

Figure 7 - Clients age



The majority of clients were between the ages of 26 - 35 (39%) and 18 – 25 (23%) The number of you people having increased from 15% in 2008/2009 to 23% in 2009/2010. The number clients between the ages of 36 and 45 amounted to 18% of all visitors. The demand for the service starts to decline between the ages of 46 - 65 with about 5% of service users being over 65.

These figures could be biased by the significant number of European workers who accessed the drop-in. This migrant worker population is ‘traditionally’ a young, active and well qualified workforce who would invariably have the capability and experience to seek advice.

Area of clients’ residence

Client monitoring has provided important demographic information. The majority of clients reside in Conwy local authority area (67%) – a 10% increase in comparison to

the previous year. This would be expected given the location of the drop-in. However, 14% of clients came from Gwynedd local authority area and 7 % from Denbighshire local authority area. Clients from Anglesey, Wrexham, Cardiff, Liverpool or Herefordshire have also accessed the service. Recognition of the quality of the service provided is perhaps evidenced by enquiries and visits made to the drop-in from areas beyond the immediate locality and as far away as London, Hereford and Cumbria.

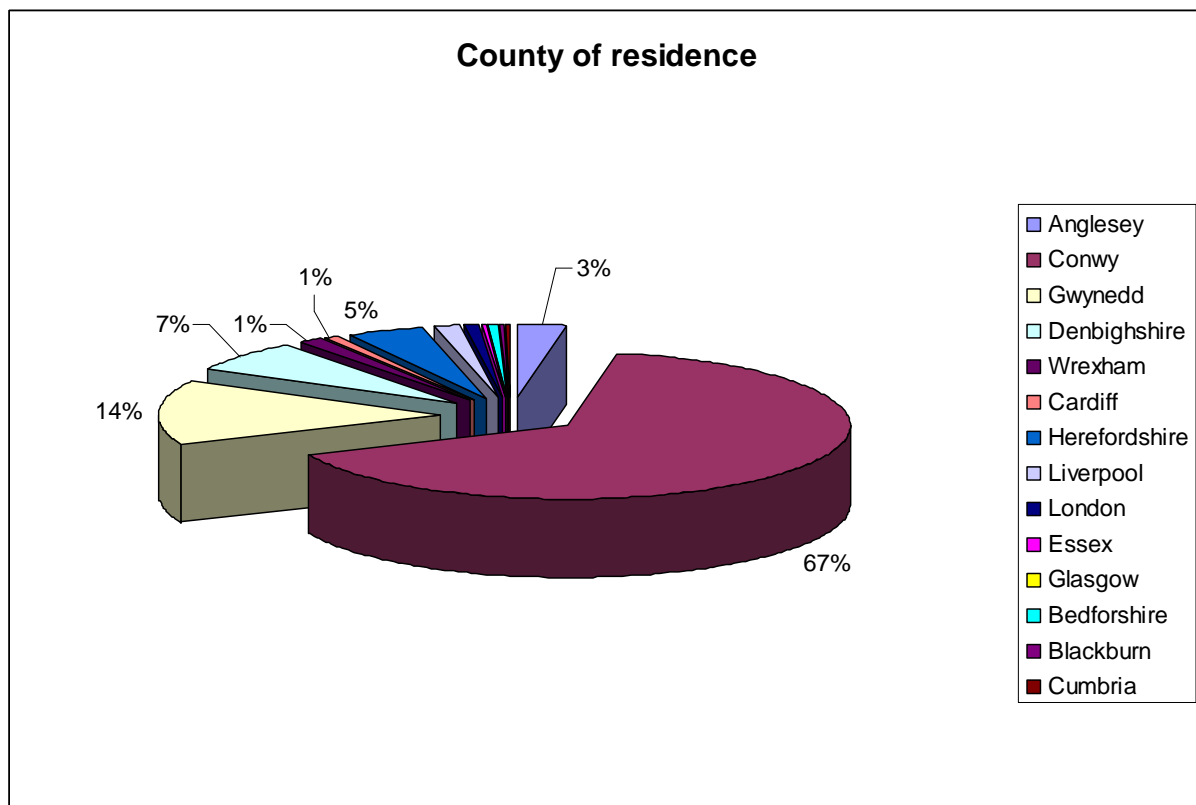


Figure 8 County or area of residence

This initiative has been BME led by an organisation that specialises in and understands the differing needs of the diverse and hard to reach client group. It is able to draw upon a wealth of BME expertise through its volunteers and board members as well as an extensive network of voluntary, community, corporate and statutory agencies.



The Conwy County Borough Council & Conwy & Denbighshire Community Safety Partnership grants have enabled NWREN to further engage with external service providers and build new links with communities thereby helping to ensure equality of opportunity for BME individuals and groups throughout the region.

Sustainability, trends and the future of the Drop-in Centre

During its 4 year existence, the North Wales Race Equality Network Drop-in centre at Llandudno has received a total of 2552 enquiries, during 197 sessions - on average 13 enquiries per each 6 hour session. Continuity of service provision and accessibility to all despite various external trends or capacity issues have always been the priority for the NWREN workers running the Drop-in who kept the service running voluntarily during the periods when funding was scarce. During this period there has been a decrease in the number of clients accessing the service. However it is apparent that a continuous presence in Llandudno library is imperative for the provision of consistent support and successful client retention.

A racially aware and culturally sensitive service together with the crucial component of a venue that is safe and non-partisan is essential in promoting an atmosphere of trust and confidentiality. Provided that there is sustainability for the Drop in Centre in the future it will continue to be of benefit for communities and other services. The goal of community integration and cohesion can be facilitated through this service and it will continue to have very positive impact through the empowerment of the hard to reach groups with information and reduction of frustration, seclusion or ghettoisation.

As a result of the economic downturn many employers have cut back on staffing. Hours have been reduced within the hotel and catering industries; another example - Welsh Country Foods is in the process of dramatically reducing their work force. It is rumoured that employees from the indigenous population will have a better chance of being retained.



The pressure on individuals to keep their jobs manifests itself in several ways:

- People are more reluctant to confront problems, a strategy of keeping your head down, mouth closed and steering clear of any conflict is engaged. For instance people are more reluctant to report Health and Safety issues; they are more open to exploitation and hesitant in asserting their working rights.
- This reluctance to report / complain is also evidenced through the complexity of some the issues presented at the drop in centre. Underlying the most pertinent issue, very often there are multi faceted layers which demand a partnership approach.
- Employer's miss-advising employees re Workers Registration Scheme.

<http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/workingintheuk/eea/wrs/whomustregister/>

For example a client from Eastern Europe worked in a factory for two years, was made redundant, only to discover that the poor advice by the employer in stating that 'there was no requirement to register in order to work in the UK' left the workers in a position where their work was effectively illegal. The client therefore had no entitlements to benefits and in effect became homeless and destitute.

This example is not unique and similar examples can be evidenced throughout North Wales.

- There is also evidence of internal migration where individuals and families will move across local, regional and national boundaries in order to secure work.
- Recent statistics published by Welsh Assembly Government reveal that more people are traveling into Wales to work now than they did at the start of the century. The 81,000 daily workforce that travel out of Wales to work loss is offset by 58,200 people resident outside of Wales coming in to work here – however, that means there is a net outflow of 22,800 people each day.



- This established commuting population differs from a migrant floating population where there are obvious implications of health housing and allied statutory services.
- The drop-in centre influences people's lives. An Eastern European female came to the drop in centre with an enquiry regarding housing. The client was educated to degree standard in her own country and held a degree in Microbiology.

In her country of origin she worked in a large clinic and held an extremely responsible job. In Llandudno she worked as a waitress. With encouragement and emotional support the client applied for work in Ysbyty Gwynedd, Bangor. NWREN assisted her with translation, to complete her application form. The client was successful and is now working in the hospital lab. She is over qualified for her current role but says "I thought that I would never be able to live in Wales and work in my own profession again".

Following the success of the NWREN drop-in centre, other areas in North Wales have progressed and developed similar concepts. NWREN is at the hub of these developments and steps have been taken to establish and share monitoring procedures and recording protocols. The sharing of this regional data will enable providers within both voluntary and statutory sectors to identify demographic patterns and needs. This information should inform strategic planning and policy formation.

NWREN is actively seeking further funding support to maintain this important facility for the communities of north Wales.