



The Star and Shadow Cinema was born out of the Side Cinema on Dean Street close to the banks of the River Tyne in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. The Side Cinema was first opened in the 1970's to show radical and independent films, but closed in the following decade. There was a

revival of this independent cinema spirit between 2001 and 2005 programmed, run and promoted by Cineside, Tyneside Radical Film Festival, A-Side and Other Side.

Following this the Star and Shadow Cinema moved to its present purpose-built site on Stepney Bank. The cinema will be moving to a new site in the new year of 2015. The Conversation Group started about 4 and a half years ago. It is advertised through the posters, leaflets and word of mouth. The Conversation Group was set up to offer solidarity and practical support to people coming to the north east, and to be a supportive and welcoming space for anyone wanting to practice or improve their English language skills and to get to know people in the local community.

The group aims to be inclusive and anti-discriminatory. Average attendance ranges from 15 to 45 people, usually 30-40 over last year or so, from a variety of backgrounds, who are learning English and provides a warm, welcoming atmosphere, with a number of fun and stimulating activities every Tuesday from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. A Living Tradition A Living Tradition is an organisation based in the North East of England which uses the heritage of human rights and community cohesion work in the region to encourage and promote it now and in the future.

A Living Tradition has worked in a number of schools in Newcastle's West End, teaching about our heritage of human rights and community cohesion work. We have also worked with numerous community groups to help them tell their stories about their lives in Northeast England today. This is the third book, which A Living Tradition has published, following on from Tales from the Real World and our book about the Roma in Newcastle's West End, It's All About Respect. For more information about A Living Tradition please go to www.alivingtradition.org.

Introduction

"Resentful Refugee Life missing mother terribly I remember home wanting to return to my village but I can't where I now live neither my country nor my village not a place for me to cultivate with people I am not related to who do not own me let's see how long I can ignore a feast of crows I eat everyday do imagine" (Tee Noe: Karen Resistance Poetry, translated and introduced by Violet Cho. Transnational Literature Vol. 6 no. 2, May 2014. <http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>)

"Communication breakdown, always the same, I'm having a nervous breakdown, drives me insane!" (Jimmy Page and Robert Plant)

"When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them" (Leviticus, 19:33)

To read the words of some people, it would appear that the life of a refugee, asylum seeker or migrant is the life of Riley, the easiest life imaginable. It would also seem that the decision to uproot and come hundreds or thousands of miles, to a land where you understand neither the language, or the wider culture, must be a decision taken lightly, as if on a whim. Whilst it may be

true that people do sometimes make very quick decisions to leave, that is more often out of necessity rather than design.

Imagine being in the shoes of a refugee, an asylum seeker or a migrant. You go through an often difficult journey, sometimes in situations of real danger and often in the hands of people you don't know and can't trust. Every moment of the journey might be fraught with danger, yet you go on, in the fond hope that somehow, somewhere, life will be better, better than the life of danger, or misery, or grinding poverty. The memories of the nightmare pushes you from behind, whilst the promise of something better pulls you onwards, ever onwards towards an uncertain new life.

Once you get to the new land, you find that it is perhaps not what you were promised, that it is not "as it said in the brochure" Suddenly you realise that you are in a land where everything is different. A land where the customs are strange and the laws are unknown – and so easily breakable, without ever knowing it. Even the simplest of human activities, such as watching television, can become difficult, when you can't understand a word of what is being said and your feelings of loneliness and isolation are simply reinforced. You have swapped what might have been a deadly, dangerous situation for a life in a bubble of misunderstanding and cold neglect. You find any port in a storm you can find, even if that port might only lead you to even greater storms ahead.

Then there is the frustration. You have come to a new country and for all the isolation at least you feel safe. You want to show your gratitude to your new hosts, you have skills to offer and you want to give something back, but...there is the language barrier, or somebody says that you can't work and pay your way in your new land, because you are an asylum seeker. You end up dependent on others for survival and those you end up dependent on, might just be the last people you should be.

There are many theories put forward as to why people come to our shores. Popular, although not necessarily accurate speculation suggests that people come to live in Britain because of our great welfare benefits scheme, whilst many others say that people come here to 'steal our jobs'.

Mysteriously, there are still others, who say that it is actually both those reasons at the same time...there are even those who would claim that people are coming here to take us over and impose an alien culture on our green and pleasant land. Yet when you hear the voices of the people themselves, who have come to live amongst us as friends and colleagues, a very different story is heard. It seems very sad that we so rarely hear the voices of those who have come to live among us. So often we only see numbers, often wholly inaccurate and nothing more than wild speculation, usually accompanied by some watery metaphor or another; swamping, flooding.....

When we hear the voices set out in this short book we are forced to leave all the clichés behind, as we are confronted with the hopes and fears, the good memories and the bad memories, the concerns and aspirations of real people, people like us.

Then there is perhaps another reason why people come to our shores, one which rarely gets mentioned. I still remember vividly when I made my first journey into the great continent of Asia. I was surprised to see the English language everywhere I went. At Schiphol Airport in Amsterdam, at the airport in Bangkok and at the smaller airport at the northern Thai city of Chiang Mai. Leaving

Chiang Mai, we made our way up towards the border with Burma and stopped at the remote town of Mae Sariang. There at last it seemed I was out of English language territory. In a restaurant, I was confronted with a menu, which seemed to be all in Thai. I turned the page in a lacklustre manner...and there it was – the whole menu in English. If we benefit from the dominance of the English language around the world, visiting restaurants where the menus are in our own language and where the signs in historic sites are immediately understandable, then it might be reasonable of us to accept that people want to come here to improve their own grasp of the lingua franca of the world.

It is also my experience that people who come to our shores actually come here because they respect our rule of law and our other customs, including our education system. Far from wanting to change our country, they want to embrace our ways. Why else would they come here? Reading about the lives of others can teach us a number of things. Firstly, it can help us reflect on our lives. It is often very tempting to become self-righteous when reading about the lives of our fellow humans. We can often fall into the trap, when reading of others' errors, of thinking that we wouldn't have made the same mistakes. But in reality we simply cannot know. If we are not put in the same position, we cannot know how we would react and what we would do. Perhaps it is better just to be thankful that we haven't been tested in some of the real-life situations, which we read about in the lives of others.

The poem at the beginning of this introduction also raises other questions about fleeing one life to live in another. The Karen people in Burma have been attacked for decades by a rampaging Burmese army, seeing their homes, their churches and their crops razed to the ground. It is therefore no wonder that such a sense of resentment comes across in the poem. I remember teaching English in Mae Ra Ma a Karen refugee camp a few miles inside Thailand and speaking to one of the refugees there about life in the camp, a place where they were at least safe, but from which there was little chance of escape. It was in effect a huge open prison camp. This particular refugee commented to me that she didn't like life in the camp and that she felt like a fish in a pool. It is little wonder that a Karen refugee might feel such anger.

When one reads of some of the awful experiences that some of the contributors to this book have been through, you might excuse them for feeling similar resentment. Yet it is striking how positive and warm many of their comments are and a testimony to their decency as our fellow humans and friends.

We have traditions in Northeast England of honouring the strangers among us, of remembering that if we go back far enough, all our families were strangers in this beautiful region. The Conversation Group at the Star and Shadow Cinema is uplifting proof that those traditions are still alive and well in Newcastle and that, for all the cold winds of intolerance and ignorance blowing in some quarters, there are still many people who think of the compassion they have needed at times in their lives and wish to empathise with those who have come to us and remember the wise old adage that strangers are merely friends you haven't met yet. I hope you enjoy reading these testimonies to life in Newcastle and Gateshead and I feel sure that the warmth and humanity of the writers will touch you as much as they have me. My sincere thanks go to Hannah and all at the

Star and Shadow Cinema and especially to all those who wrote so much and so movingly about their lives.

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I am 45 years old. In my family I have 8 sisters and 8 brothers.

I come from Congo, from Kinshasa. My life was good in that time.

I say this because when I used to be in Congo, I had my little shop to make clothes.

Now I live in the U.K. My life now is better than before. The reason for this is that I have started to write a little bit of English and also I have started to speak a little bit of English.

One thing I would really like to say is I want to have skills in sewing and dress-making.

The things that are important to me are to speak good English and also reading and writing.

I would really like to know how to write good writing in English. I don't like to be the same in doing nothing. The best thing about my life is to continue studying.

I want to stay in the UK for all of my life, because of the problems, which brought me here.

What I want to do in the next five years is to be a seamstress.

The most important thing I want to say about my life is it won't be the same if I really like to improve too many things. Five things which are really important to me are reading, writing, listening, speaking and improving my vocabulary.

What I most hope for is to find someone who can help me to improve my English. 49 I also want to say thanks to you and all your staff.

Anonymous

My name is Mabinty .

I am 45 years old. I have 3 children. I came from Sierra Leone.

My life in the UK has been so quiet, because I lost my way in life.

It was so hard for me. The reason for this is that I was misled by some wicked people.

They made me and my children separate and they are in a different part of the world. When I first came here, they took me to a house and I had to just live inside the house all the time, so that they could make use of me.

I went through Hell.

They work in a team, some here and some in Sierra Leone and they tell you everything will be O.K. if you come to Britain.

I used to have my own business, my own car and my own house and I gave it to them.

They are very hard people. Now I live in Gateshead and my life now is new.

The one interesting thing that has happened has been that I have met nice people in the Northeast and that makes me feel better. I have started training to be a care worker. I have been learning about mental health. Mental health can be when people are depressed or suffering from anxiety. It also includes people who are traumatised. People who have brain damage have moderate or severe learning difficulties. We can help people with mental illness, to exercise and by giving them proper food.

Asylum people are people suffering from depression or anxiety, which are mental health problems. Some of them will be kept in different houses, while 51 they have to be treated, because the community will be frightened to have access to them. I have just started a course in Mental Health Care. The course involves examining different types of mental health issues and takes place at Newcastle College.

I want to do the course, because I want to do a caring job, like looking after old people or disabled people. At the end of the course, I will be looking for a job in a care home.

Mabinty

My name is Omar.

I am 22 years old. In my family, I have dad, mom, and brothers and sisters. Their names are Khalifa, who is my dad, Rizwan, who is my mom, and Ibrahim, who is my little brother and Maiwa and Nasra, who are my little sisters. I'm the older one.

I come from Tanzania. My life in Tanzania was too funny. I say this because I was together with my friends doing funny things, which we really enjoyed.

Now I live in England. My life now is not quite the same as it was in Tanzania. The reason for this is that I have not many funny friends.

Omar

I am 42 years old. In my family I have 5 people. Their names are Toma, Elisa, Ambuase, Emanue and myself.

I come from Congo. My life in Congo was bad. I say this because we had no money and there was fighting. I was against Kabila.

Now I live in Newcastle. My life now is still bad. The reason for this is because I have no family. I miss my child. She is 3 years old.

One thing I would like to say is I would like a good life here. One interesting thing that happened was on holiday when in Congo. I want to go to Congo in the future, but it is not safe now.

The thing that is important to me is my child, who is 3 years old. My life in work last summer was good. I say this because I like summer. The work was cleaner. I really like to read books. I want to learn English, so that it will make my life better.

Although I am not from England, I can still write in English. I don't like films. I went to College yesterday. I want to stay in college for 2 years.

Anonymous

My name is John. I am 33 years old.

I come from Togo. I have no family in the UK, but I have family in Togo. My life in UK is I say this because I am free to go back to Togo.

Now I live in Sunderland. My life is now better; the reason for this is because I feel safe. One interesting thing is that I have support. I have new friends, new people, new life.

One thing I would really like to say is because I have my support in my accommodation, I am so happy. One thing which is important to me is to be strong.

John

My name is Guillermo and I am 35 years old. I used to live in Spain with my mother and my brother, whose names are Rita and Miguel.

My life in Spain was great, however I was unemployed and I had to do new things like learning English or improving it. In Spain I have studied for a Masters in Business Administration. I have work at different areas like accountancy, as consultant....however, the deep crisis in Spain with their unemployment rate close to 26% makes it very difficult to get a job and sometimes the only path is continuing learning. In that case: English language.

Now I am living in Newcastle and I work as a volunteer at Oxfam three days per week. On 4th July I have to go back to Spain, because I will have a Christening, where I will be the Godfather. I hope to come back to England in the middle days of July up to October, when I'll go back definitely to my country.

I got to Newcastle three months ago looking for a job. However, when I started at Oxfam it was great because although it is no job, I'm improving my CV with skilled work. It could be

that when I come back to the UK in summer I would look for a less skilled job. Nevertheless, my main goal is improving my English language.

Guillermo

My name is Sajida. I am 25 years old.

In my family, I have one sister and two brothers. I come from Pakistan. My life in Pakistan was bad. I say this because it was hard.

Now I live in Newcastle. My life now is good. I say this because the people are good. Some people are not friendly.

Sajida

My name is Ranya I am 41 years old. In my family I have one daughter and a son. I come from Egypt. My life in Egypt was good. I say this because I had work and family.

Now I live in Newcastle. My life now has worries. The reason for this is the different language. One interesting thing that happened was watching the Millenium Bridge opening and closing.

One thing I would really like to say is that I hope to learn English well. The things that are important to me are learning and my children. I really like to help people. I don't like to stop learning.

The best thing about Sohaila is her smile.

What I want to do in the next five years is to become a Science teacher in Newcastle. The most important thing I want to say about my life is that it's great. Things which are really important to me are family, improving myself and my health.

Ranya

My name is Sohaila. I am 17 years old. In my family I have two brothers, mom and dad. Their names are Eslam, Body, Ranya and Ahmed. I come from Egypt. My life in Egypt was good. I say this because I had a lot of friends.

Now I live in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. My life now is nice. The reason for this is the good weather(!) One interesting thing is that I got lost in the airport, when I came from Egypt to Newcastle!

One thing I would really like to do is I want to be an engineer. The thing that is important to me is talking to my friends. I really like playing basketball. I don't like drinking coffee. The best thing about my friends is that they make me laugh.

I want to stay in Newcastle for I have a better education here. What I want in the next five years is to be a famous engineer and work for a big company. The most important thing to say about my life is that it's cool.

Five things which are really important to me are: Eating Drinking Sleeping Meeting new people Playing basketball or new sport What I must hope for is to speak English well. I also want to say that here is a good place and I am proud to come from Egypt.

Sohaila

My name is Sidje. I'm 27 years old.

In my family I have 3 sisters and 3 brothers. Their names are Lazane, Jean-Marie, Arthur, Yolande, Lysiane and Pauline. I have come from France, but I'm originally from the Ivory Coast.

My life in Newcastle is boring. I say this because I used to live in a big city with transport all the time. In Paris when you take a bus, you can hear a voice, saying the stop where you are and the name of the next stop.

When I came to Newcastle I found it difficult to use buses. I always got lost and when I asked my way, I had a problem understanding people, because of their accent. I couldn't understand a word!

Last week I was in London and when I was speaking with some people, one of them asked me if I was living in the north of England, because I used some Geordie words! I didn't know it was specifically Geordie; I thought it was the same everywhere in the UK.....

Now I live here to improve my English. I came here to improve my English. I came here because I found my au pair family in Newcastle. I have done with them and I expect to find another family in London for the next month.

One interesting thing that happened was meeting friendly people. Here I can go out with them and look around the city. When I came last August, I could only say my name - that's all. Now I'm able to engage in conversation, so I'm really proud of myself. The things that are important to me are my family and independence.

Sidje

My name is Curt. I am 36 years old.

In my family I have one brother and one sister. Their names are Daniel and Mariana. I have come from Argentina, where I lived for the past two years.

I was born in Italy, but I was raised in Brazil. I moved to Argentina to work on a film and now my work is finished. Instead of going back to Brazil, I thought I should try my luck in England.

So, I came to live with a friend, who was already living and working here. I thought that if I couldn't find work, at least I would improve my English.

I want to stay in Newcastle for at least four months - in England for 6 months - more if I get a job.

What I want to do in the next six years is to work in other places in Europe, earn some money, maybe have kids and get married. I usually don't do too much thinking about the future. I tend to focus more on the present most of the time. I want to stay in England for at least six months

Curt

My name is Viola. I'm 30 years old.

In my family I have an older sister, my parents and a dog. Their names are Jola, my sister, Ula, my mum and Henry, my dad. My little dog or poodle is called Pesto and his name was inspired by a famous Italian cuisine speciality.

I come from the central part of Poland. I left my country 3 years ago, to experience a new life abroad.

The first place I came to in England was Durham. My life in Durham was very peaceful and quiet. I say this because I was staying in the countryside outside a small town surrounded by beautiful nature. I used to work and live in a 13th century country house, that became a hotel. Every day I used to go for long walks or runs in the woods that surrounded the hotel.

I was working in hotel restaurant as a waitress. I used to serve breakfast and dinner and I occasionally I helped out preparing big events like weddings or conferences. The job was an interesting experience to me. It gave me a chance to learn some new skills, practice my English and meet interesting people.

Now I live in Newcastle. Despite the fact that I liked my countryside life, I decided to move to the town at some point. I thought that living in a big town would give me the opportunity to meet more people and practice my English more. My life now is more busy. The reason for that is that there are more attractions in the town. I've been in Newcastle for just two months and I'm still discovering the city.

The more I know it, the more I like it. I really like my little flat in Byker.

Wiola

My name is Salak. I am thirty-seven years old. In my family I have three brothers and three sisters. I come from Libya.

My life in Libya was good. I say this because I had good friends.

Now I live in Newcastle. My life now is also good. The reason for this is because I have a good life.

One interesting thing that happened that happened when I came to Britain was that I lost my wallet, but then I found it.

One thing I would really like to say is that I hope so much to study a PhD in Geography. I have a wife, who is very important to me. I would really like to become an important person and I don't like to lose at sport or anything.

Salak

I live in Manchester or to be precise Salford. For my shopping, I do go to town, but my favourite part of Manchester is the Trafford Shopping Centre. I often go to town for a walk or to do some shopping.

Most of my time I spend in Manchester involved with my children's activities and have got two kids and I enjoy every moment of it.

Douceline

My name is Olga. I am 12 years old (it was a time ago!!)

In my family I have seven brothers and sisters. I come from Spain.

My life in Spain was relaxing. I say this because sometimes I miss my roots.

Now I live in Newcastle. My life now is normal. I would love to travel around the world, meeting new people, discovering new places at the moment like many of us, I'm.....

One interesting thing that has happened is that I have discovered the Star and Shadow Cinema, which is a nice place.

One thing I would like to say is that I would like to stay here. I would like to speak English well. I don't like spicy food.

One thing about my life, which could be better, would be to have my family over here from Spain.

The best thing about Spain is the food. I want to stay in England for a while.

What I want to do in the next five years is to go to Peru.

The most important thing I want to say about my life is that there so many important things.... I came over here a few years ago... I will tell you a little bit about myself... When I finished my studies in Spain, I felt a little lost, I didn't know what I could do with my life. I had two choices; the first was to find the best possible job, open a savings account, look for a house..... You know all those things that adults do... The second one was to fly away, so here I am. It has been a hell of a ride, but I can say that from all the good, I became stronger. It isn't a bad quality, what do you think?

My family lives in Asturia and I suggest you visit my region, but the rural areas not the cities. I grew up on a small farm with my 4 brothers and my 3 sisters. I have lovely memories of my childhood; I didn't have an i-pad or ipods, but I fully enjoyed games and outdoor activities.

I used to go swimming in the river Eo. I used to go walking into the local forest and I consider myself fortunate to live in the time, family and area, where I was born.

Olga

My name is Kidan. I am 31 years old. In my family I have one boy. His name is Eyob. My life in Eritrea was bad, because of the war. Now I live in Newcastle and my life is now good, because there is not war here. One thing that happened to me was that my friend died and there is no peace. I really like to be with my family. One thing I don't like is fighting and one thing about my country which could be better would be peace.

Kidan

My name is Sbi. I live in Gateshead. I go shopping in Newcastle and near to where I live. What I like most about Newcastle is the shops and the people.

My name is Amadou. I am 25 years old. In my family, we have a humble life. Their names are Isa, Madou, Salie and myself. I came here from Sierra Leone as a refugee, because of the civil war chaos and I followed the Elders. My life in the Midlands was too lousy compared to the North. I say this because I have found the North more relaxing and quiet. Now I live in Gateshead and it's O.K. My life is now more manageable. The reason for this is the opportunity to start life fresh for good. One interesting thing that happened was survival-related crime due to immigration issues. If you don't have the right to work, you can only go hungry for so many days. One thing I would really like to say is my situation helped me to think about my life, to correct the wrongs and put in the right in my life. The things that are important to me are my life, my daughter and my loved ones. I would really like to go onto further education. I don't really like to make any more mistakes. One thing about my life which could be better, will be decided on someone's desk. GOD BLESS HIM/HER. The best thing about life is that if you associate yourself with good, you will always get a positive response. I want to stay in the North for good reasons. What I want to do in the next five years is to settle down and live a humble life. The most important I want to say about my life is that it is not bad, but it's not the best. 71 Five things which are really important to me are: family, goodwill, work, my daughter and tolerance. I also want to say to all the people of goodwill I have met on my path. Everybody makes mistakes, sometimes because we are not perfect. There is a consciousness for every mistake and you must pay for mistakes one way or the other. Some people pay a lot more than other due to their status. Imagine you feel like you have to pay forever and you can't see the end of the tunnel. It is totally hopeless. It feels good to know that some people care, especially strangers. Some times your own people look down on you, when you need them the most. It is so amazing how good people with goodwill are showing love and support to people in need. (GOD BLESS THEM ALL). I will forever maintain my respect and loyalty to all the good people helping us out. It is so frustrating, when you know that in you are a good person and want to improve your life for good, but no one is paying attention or believing you. Past mistakes seem to overshadow all the good things you are trying to do. When you're constantly judged by your past mistakes, sometimes you feel like giving up. For now I am focusing on doing good and I hope for the best. I believe that there is a reward for every man or woman who tries. I am very grateful for what I have now, even though it is so little.

England is a fair country with great people.

Amadou

My name is Hamid. I am 30 years old. In my family I have four brothers. I come from Iran. My life in Iran was very busy, because I had a job and responsibilities. I had to leave for lots

of reasons. Now I live in the UK, my life is very quiet and I feel lonely. The reason for this that I couldn't relate to the people because of the language and cultural barriers. Nothing interesting has happened.

Hamid

My name is Marie. I am from Spain, Barcelona to be exact.

I am 37 years old.

I have just finished my degree and came to England to build my own business.

Now I am living in Fawdon, but I want to move to Jesmond, because when I take the Metro I listen to the people and I don't understand any word from the people from Fawdon, but when people from Jesmond get on the Metro I understand them!

I really miss the sun and the food. I would like to improve my English, before finding a job. I know there is help from the government for opening your own business.

Of course I miss my country and family , but I think I can find a better life here. The weather in Newcastle is weird, because some days are cold and others are hot!

My great surprise was when I went to Ashington by bus and I was coughing on the bus and a lady offered me some water. People from Newcastle are very friendly.

Marie

My name is Junior T A.

I am thirty-three years old.

In my family I am alone.

I come from a Christian family.

My life in the UK was difficult. I say this because I was feeling alone without my mum. Now I live in peace with my girlfriend.

My life now is much better. The reason for this is because I feel free to enjoy life with my friend.

One interesting that happened to me was when I met my girlfriend for the first time.

One thing I would really like to say is that I love the country.

The things that are important to me are my new family and hope to have a new one come.

My name is Tony.

I am 30 years old.

In my family I have one boy. His name is Simon.

I come from Ethiopia.

My life in my country was not good. I say this because I was a soldier. I was forced to be a soldier.

Now I live in the UK in Newcastle. The reason for this is because I am safe in this country.

One interesting that happened to me was the terrible situation in my country.

One thing I would really like to say about this country is that people are kind and polite.

The things that are important to me are that I can see different problems, so now I have got a problem, it is easy to fix the problem.

i am more confident.

Tony

My name is Blas

I am 36 years old.

I come from South America (Argentina)

My life in Argentina was sad. I say this because my family and I suffered a lot from the big gap between the wealthiest and poorest people.

Now I live in the U.K.!!

My life now is different. My reason for this is because I feel fine, happy and

I've never felt as a foreigner. Basically this is because the British people haven't made me feel it. The vast majority have been friendly, patient, polite and willing to help me.

When I arrived in the U.K. (Newcastle) I used to ask them (people) to be patient due to my English not being good. None of them caused me problems; rather they were always very kind to me.

One thing I would really like to say is that British people say "please", "sorry" and "thank you", a lot of the time. It is something that demonstrates how polite they are.

Things that are important to me are my mother (I hope to bring her next year). I haven't seen her for over four years. I also like to see people happy and in peace.

I had studied English in Argentina about 20 years ago, for 5 years. Although my English was very good, my low confidence brought me a lot of problems in my daily life. I even lost a job.

To leave Argentina was a long process, it took years to think about it. When I left that country I knew it was for good. Some people (in Argentina) think that I was wrong when I decided to leave Argentina. They don't know that it was my mother who encouraged me to do it. She has always thought that impatient due to my English not being good. None of them caused me problems; rather they were always very kind to me.

She has always thought that in Argentina there wasn't a future. I agree with her.

My mum and I have seen the immense sacrifice of my grandparents' generation and it was sad to see them struggling to survive all their life. I didn't want to live the same story.

I don't regret it. I am happy in the U.K. Here I have a life. In Argentina, I didn't have it. I used to survive there.

The Newcastle College and people like Hannah play a huge positive role in the

community. Both help people to integrate into the society, especially those who arrive from different cultures. My friend Paul, who I met in Spain, helped me a lot. He brought me here. My flatmate, Gordon has an important role as well.

Paul brought me over here and Gordon is the owner of the house where I live. Gordon helps me a lot with his patience and his advice. Steve is another great friend, who like Gordon always gives me wise advice.

Paul, Gordon and Steve have immense hearts and for me they are a mix of friends, older brothers and parents.

I feel in debt to them eternally.

Blas

My name is Baber.

I am 34 years old.

In my family I have one daughter and my wife.

My daughter's name is Alceba and my wife's name is Sara.

I am from Pakistan. I have been here for two and a half years.

Now I live in Gateshead.

One thing I would really like to say is that going to the gym is something I enjoy.

My life now is good. The reason for this is that I can relax. I really like to play with my daughter.

I don't like to go to the big shopping centre.

I want to stay in England for my life.

What I want to do in the next five years is to find work.

The most important thing I want to say about my life is that it has been good since coming to England.

Baber