

Evaluation Report

The Illegals

“Undocumented migrants were a policy issue for me, now [they are] a human issue.”

December 2008

1 Introduction and overview

Charity Doctor LLP was commissioned by Actors for Human Rights to undertake an evaluation of its documentary play *The Illegals* funded by The City Parochial Foundation.

The overall aim of the evaluation was to evaluate the impact of the play in terms of raising issues connected with undocumented migrants living and working in London.

The objectives of the evaluation were

1. To evaluate how effectively the play raised the awareness and understanding of the general public
2. To evaluate how effectively the play affected the perceptions of the general public in relation to undocumented migrants
3. To evaluate how effectively the play motivated and inspired those already active in campaigning for better human rights for migrants
4. To evaluate the usefulness of the play in terms of raising awareness and changing perceptions

The evaluation used group discussions to gather rich qualitative feedback from the two audiences to whom it was shown and a short, questionnaire to gather general feedback. The two focus groups were composed of a random selection of audience members who volunteered to stay behind after the play to discuss a set of questions designed to gauge their immediate reactions and reflections on the play. Focus group participants were given an information sheet outlining what they were agreeing to be involved in and were asked to sign a consent form.

In the report, direct quotes are shown in italics and speech marks. These quotes are not attributed to any individual to ensure confidentiality.

The play was shown to two live audiences on 21st November 2008. One audience comprised mainly people who were unfamiliar with the issues and the other audience comprised largely individuals who were aware of, and largely sympathetic to, the situations faced by undocumented migrants.

The play consisted of the stories of seven undocumented migrants as told to the researcher and read by actors. The stories were intertwined and unfolded as the play developed.

2 Findings

Written comments on the play were received from a total of 109 people of whom: 54 were aware of the issues of undocumented migrants, 44 people were either unaware or not very aware of the issues and eleven who did not say. Of these 109, sixteen also participated in one of two focus groups.

Most of the comments were very positive and the play had an impact on everyone who responded and raised most people's awareness of at least one issue. Those who were unfamiliar with the issues were generally more shocked by the play in that they hadn't realised the extent of the plight faced by undocumented migrants. Those who were familiar with the issues had more comments to say in relation to how the play could have been improved and how it could be used to promote the messages.

Below are some comments from people for whom the issues were new and which capture the views of this section of the audience:

"This is a revelatory play which told me about the true story of migrants beyond the stereotypical media clichés."

"I learn about asylum seekers / refugees / illegal immigrants at school. But it always seems like individual stories are lost in the system and the law. It was great to know insights of individual stories."

"It made me think about London in a different, unfamiliar way – just how pervasive and ignored these workers are (such low pay and long hours). How easy it is for unscrupulous employers to exploit these people – people with 'papers' need to stand up for them. Thank you so much for your great work. I feel more strongly about protecting the rights and protesting to change the laws on illegal immigrants".

Below are some comments from people who were familiar with the issues and which capture the views of this section of the audience:

"The figures and facts were made clear. Very interesting to hear different stories, I usually hear stories from a medical perspective."

"I study migration so I'm quite aware of all the issues related to it. However, I very much enjoyed listening to the true stories. I loved the interpretation!"

"There is an urgent need for society in Britain to learn about undocumented migrants and support an amnesty."

“Reminded me of the role of the state in creating the problems BUT if the state was more competent, it could be a lot worse – fewer people would arrive and more would leave. It is a bit over focused on asylum – when the issue is much bigger than that.”

The ‘Illegals’ - a powerful and moving play that put across a complex set of powerful messages and that challenged at different levels.

Feedback from both focus group participants and both audiences was very positive with many people commenting on the power of the play and performances.

The structure of the play and the fact that it used readings of transcripts was considered very powerful. The intertwining of stories and the interactions of the characters meant that the play kept the attention of the audience. As one focus group participant commented,

“It might have been too much if just one person told their story at a time”

The stories themselves were both moving and funny and brought home very strongly, to both audiences, that the stories were about real people. Many people commented on how effective was the use of transcripts of real people’s stories and how this humanised the characters and made their situations much more real. Comments that typified the responses include:

“Each story is unique and very moving.”

“Individual stories count especially in a close-up theatrical situation.”

“Very important to show the true human side of each story – which this play did in a very strong and heartfelt way – EXCELLENT.”

“ The agonising human situations that lead people to become undocumented – you hear about these situations but this really brought it home.”

“How important is to humanise the reality of illegal migrants – They are people, not numbers!! I thought this key point was excellent to be highlighted.”

Humour was used to great effect and both lightened the play for the audience and helped individuals cope with some of the very poignant and sobering messages that the play put across.

“The play opened up lightly but covered a lot of detailed ground – humour throughout helped to soften some of the harsh messages”

The casting was excellent and the actors gave “powerful performances” which “reminded me that the characters were very real”. For many of the audience the end was very powerful and helped to reinforce the key messages of the play.

“The end was very moving and powerful piece of theatre – reminded me that it was verbatim. The fact that the people thanked the listener was very moving”

The play had a strong impact on the audience. For most people this was either raising issues that hitherto they had been unaware of or of making them more aware of the difficulties that undocumented migrants face in their daily lives. It also provoked strong feelings.

“It made me want to kick the British Government and the stupidity of the situation”.

[I was] frustrated by the bureaucracy and the merry go round it puts people onto”

“It shocked me – I didn’t appreciate the diversity of the issues, that it was such a big issue and how the different aspects of people’s lives were affected – it upset me”

“[The play] made me want to do something”

A couple of people in the audience were asylum seekers and for them the play was “therapeutic”.

The play successfully raised awareness of a number of key issues

One of the objectives of the play was to raise awareness of a number of key issues:

- a. The high levels of fear and loneliness and other difficulties experienced by undocumented migrants
- b. Undocumented migrants are forced into illegality and do not set out intentionally to become ‘illegal’
- c. Undocumented migrants are essential to the economy of this country
- d. The large amounts of money sent ‘home’ by undocumented migrants.
- e. The number of undocumented migrants who live and work in this country

Feedback from the questionnaires and analysis of the focus groups interviews demonstrates that the play successfully put across all of these key messages to both audiences.

When asked whether the play had raised awareness of five different issues, in all but one area over 80% of both audiences said it had. Interestingly, the play had marginally more of an effect in terms of raising awareness of the issues amongst those in the audience who were already involved in the field than it did on those who were not involved. One might have expected this to be the other way round.

A summary of the number and percentage of respondents who said that the play had raised their awareness of specific issues is given in the table below.

Summary of the number and percentage of respondents who said that the play had raised their awareness of specific issues

Issue	A 54 respondents		B 44 respondents		C 11 respondents		All 109 respondents	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Difficulties faced by undocumented migrants	46	85	39	89	9	82	94	86
Their circumstances and the reasons they become 'illegal'	49	91	39	89	9	82	97	89
The UK economy needs the labour of undocumented migrants	42	78	35	80	10	91	87	80
Developing countries receive more money from the earnings of undocumented migrants than from development aid	47	87	40	91	9	82	96	88
Number of undocumented migrants who live and work in the UK	45	83	31	70	8	73	84	77

Key to the table

- A – members of the audience who worked in the field of undocumented migrants
- B – members of the audience who did not work in the field of undocumented migrants
- C– members of the audience who did not say whether or not they worked in the field of undocumented migrants
- D – all members of the audience

a. The high levels of fear and loneliness and other difficulties experienced by undocumented migrants

94 out of 109 respondents (86%) said their awareness of the difficulties faced by undocumented migrants had been raised. A number of people commented on two particular points in the play as being particularly telling in relation to the levels of fear that undocumented migrants experience. One point was where one of the characters

had talked about how he always looks for an escape route whenever he enters an unfamiliar place. Another was when one of the characters were discussing how they travelled by bus rather than by train because there are more checks on trains.

Comments that capture the views of the audience in relation to this issue:

“The fear of being caught – lousy life!” (a comment by someone who was familiar with the situation faced by undocumented migrants)

“The personal cost that the huge risk of becoming an undocumented migrant brings”.
(a comment by someone who was not familiar with the situation faced by undocumented migrants)

b. Undocumented migrants are forced into illegality and do not set out intentionally to become ‘illegal’

Interestingly this was the main issue that the play raised, with 89% of the audience saying that it had raised their awareness more in this area than in any other. The reasons why undocumented migrants come to the UK, how their circumstances change and how the system contributes to their illegal status came across strongly and evoked strong reactions from the audience with many expressing anger and frustration. The fact that undocumented migrants do not choose to be ‘illegal’ and that they all want to become ‘legal’ also came across very strongly.

Comments that capture the views of the audience in relation to this issue:

“ I have learned that the reasons why people choose to live in a foreign country against all odds, are more complex than I realised.” (a comment by someone who was familiar with the situation faced by undocumented migrants)

“The problems [that the] legal system and bureaucracy create for people andhow keen people are to pay tax!” (a comment by someone who was not familiar with the situation faced by undocumented migrants)

c. Undocumented migrants are essential to the economy of this country

80% of the audience said their awareness of the contribution made by undocumented migrants to UK economy had been raised and a number felt that the UK Government was hypocritical in treating these migrants as illegal yet taking full advantage of their labour. Some people wondered if the political messages were necessary whereas for others these points helped to contextualise the stories.

Comments that capture the views of the audience in relation to this issue:

"The value of the workforce of undocumented migrants, injustice and exploitation. Made me think more about how much less the average Briton knows." (a comment by someone who was familiar with the situation faced by undocumented migrants)

"Undocumented workers are essential to this country and should not be forced into illegality – if they were legal it would make it much easier for everybody".
(Focus group participant)

"There is hypocrisy in this country. For example government turn a blind eye to cleaners in the House of Commons." (Focus group participant)

d. The large amounts of money sent 'home' by undocumented migrants.

88% of questionnaire respondents said that the play had raised their awareness of the fact that developing countries receive more money from the earnings of undocumented migrants than from development aid. This was the issue that came across most strongly to the members of the audience who were not familiar with undocumented migrants - 91% of this group said this was the issue that they took from the play.

Two comments, both from people who were not familiar with the issues of undocumented migrants, that capture the views of the audience in relation to the amounts of money sent home:

"The money sent back was a surprising fact to learn!."

"I was amazed by the amount of money sent back to other countries from undocumented migrants."

e. The number of undocumented migrants who live and work in this country

Fewer people commented on this issue than on the other issues. However 77% of the questionnaire respondents said the play had raised their awareness in this area.

"It made me think about London in a different, unfamiliar way – just how pervasive and ignored these workers are (such low pay and long hours). How easy it is for unscrupulous employers to exploit these people – people with 'papers' need to stand up for them. Thank you so much for your great work. I feel more strongly about protecting the rights and protesting to change the laws on illegal immigrants."
(Focus group participant)

In addition to the five key messages that the play set out to put across, two other issues also came across strongly: one is that bureaucracy is a barrier for many undocumented migrants and the other is the level of exploitation of undocumented migrants in this country, particularly by the people who are supposed to help them. This latter point was highlighted on the feedback forms and was raised in both focus groups and was a topic that angered and frustrated many people. Many people in the audience hadn't appreciated how much time undocumented migrants spend waiting – waiting for their cases to be heard, waiting for their cases to be reviewed, waiting for employers to pay them money, waiting for officials to notice them and take action to remove them from the country.

“People cease to become human beings in the eyes of officials – they just become cases”

“ I didn't realise before – how long undocumented workers can be in limbo for.”

“The difficulty migrants face especially in the face of unsympathetic solicitors who are less bothered about the actual problem and more about the law and their job.”

“Undocumented migrants are being exploited and oppressed by people (including from their own countries or in similar situations) who are supposed to help them including unscrupulous lawyers; these are the people who benefit.”

“The extent of gross exploitation of migrants is highlighted well in these accounts.”

A competent piece of theatre in its own right

Whilst most members of the audience commented on the issues that the play raised, a number did comment on the play itself as a piece of theatre and on the performances of the cast. Positive comments were received about the scripting, editing, acting and casting.

The fact that the play *“used a minimal amount editing and the stories were as told by the migrants”* combined with *“very powerful performances”* made the ‘Illegals’ *“a strongly put together piece of theatre”*. A number of the audience remarked that the *“play works well as a piece of theatre”*. The actors *“were very convincing as characters”* and *“the performances put across some of the little things like a taking a bus rather than a train that we take for granted”*.

A comment that sums up the overall reaction was made by one the questionnaire respondents who said about the play, *“The power of good theatre to convey ideas and humanity with passion.”*

3 Suggestions for improvement and wider roll out

Most of the comments on how the play could have been improved came from the focus groups. A couple of people (who were both familiar with the issues) thought that the play should have included a wider range of nationalities and in particular a migrant from Eastern Europe as it was felt that their experiences may have been different. One person wondered whether these migrants are perceived as 'less foreign' and may therefore not struggle to get by as much as the individuals who were featured. On a related point one person, who worked with migrants and who was very familiar with the issues, thought that the play could have presented the perspectives of undocumented migrants who flee their countries for reasons such as war and conflict and that in doing so the fear and angst of people may have come across more strongly. However a couple of people in the focus group who were unfamiliar with the issues thought that this "*would have made the play too heavy*". This comment underlines the different starting points of the two audience groups.

At the end of the play, there is a scene where the characters are talking about the difference it would make to their lives if they were given legal status i.e. given their papers. However none of them achieve this and one of the focus groups thought that they would have liked to have seen an example of someone who got their papers and whether or this did make a difference to them. For example would they still be employed in menial jobs and how much would legality impact on their psychological health?

A couple of people thought that they would have liked the play to give them some pointers as to what action they could take as citizens to help address the issues raised in the play. These comments came from people who were unfamiliar with the issues and a number of them felt angry at the situation faced by undocumented migrants but also frustrated because they didn't know what they could do. Some other suggestions included a discussion session or question and answer after the play to talk through the issues raised.

Over one third (36%) of the audience thought that the play was a little bit too long "*it could have been about 15 minutes shorter*" being a typical response. However 64% thought the length was about right. Interestingly 52% of the audience who were unfamiliar with the issues thought that the play was too long compared with only 30% of the audience who were familiar with the issues. This seems to reflect the fact that for those new to the subject, the issues are complex and for them the play was more challenging.

A number of people thought that the play could be adapted in different formats for different purposes e.g. a radio play, a CD, a series of shorter commentaries, having stories from younger people. This they thought would help to maximise the play's impact and get the messages across to a wider audience.

On this point, both focus groups thought that the play should be extensively used to raise awareness of the difficulties experienced by undocumented migrants. The suggestions for places where the play should be shown were:

- ⇒ Trade union conferences – to keep the messages live within the employment context
- ⇒ Within immigrant communities – perhaps through churches – particularly to highlight how much people are being exploited and oppressed by their own people; also can be therapeutic
- ⇒ Universities and schools – to target future politicians and policy makers
- ⇒ Youth training colleges – to target young people, perhaps as part of a community cohesion agenda
- ⇒ Police training college – it was suggested that the play should be a part of the syllabus
- ⇒ Public sector officers particularly Home Office and Social Services staff

There was a question posed but not answered about how the play could be used to draw in a less sympathetic audience and reach the wider general public. One person suggested the play be shown in the foyer of the Daily Mail!

4 Summary

In summary *The Illegals* is a well developed and superbly scripted play that uses transcripts of stories of real undocumented migrants. It is this powerful human aspect that ensures the play gets its messages across. The play both entertains and challenges. The level of humour and the grim reality of the individuals and their lives blend together and take the audience on a learning journey.

The play impacts at different levels and, although for some it was a little too long, there is something in it for everyone. For some it raises awareness of the difficulties that undocumented migrants face, for others it raises political issues and for others it raises feelings of anger and frustration.

It has the potential for wider use and could be put on in a wide variety of settings and shown to a range of different audiences. There are messages in the play that could be directed at communities and individuals to whom undocumented migrants turn for help and support and by whom the undocumented migrants are often exploited. There are issues and points that could be debated such as what would happen to the UK economy if all undocumented migrants were sent home. There are messages for policy makers and there are messages for the general public that give a different perspective to the popular press.

One of the challenges for Actors for Human Rights will be to maximise this potential. A number of people in the audience were already involved with the its work, however many were not and 40 people left their emails at the end of the play stating that they would either like to join the mailing list or find out more about the work of the theatre company suggesting that the play is capable not only of raising awareness but also of inspiring people to want to do something positive.

4 Appendices

1. Focus Group discussion questions
2. Focus Group Information Sheet and Consent Form
3. Questionnaire

Focus Group discussion questions

- What were your overall impressions of the play?
- What do you think were the key messages that the play put across?
- What did you learn / what new insights into the issues affecting undocumented migrants living and working in London did you get from watching the play?
- (How) has the play made you view migrants in a different light – what has changed in your perceptions?
- How convincing were the arguments put across in the play?
- (How) has the play helped you to develop a better understanding of your own views towards undocumented migrants?
- Has the play motivated you to do anything new/different? If so, what would you now do as a result of seeing the play?
- Was there anything that the play did particularly well?
- Were there any aspects of the play that you did not like or found difficult to understand / cope with?
- How do you think the play could be used as a tool for raising awareness and understanding of the issues affecting undocumented migrants living and working in London?
- In summary – what is your lasting memory from the play – what will you take away with you?

The Illegals

FOCUS GROUP INFORMATION SHEET

The Ice and Fire Theatre Company sees theatre as the natural medium to communicate stories that make real and relevant the impact of human rights issues on our everyday lives. Following the showing of *The Illegals* – a play depicting first hand testimonies of undocumented migrants living and working in London – we wish to gather feedback from our audience.

You are invited to take part in this feedback through a discussion group. Before you decide if you want to take part, it is important that you understand why the research is being done, and what it will involve. Please take the time to read the following information carefully and decide whether or not you wish to take part.

The aim of the work is to gather immediate feedback from today's audience so as to explore:

- What you thought about the play and the messages it put across
- How The Ice and Fire Theatre Company could use the play to raise awareness of the circumstances faced by undocumented migrants.

We would like to stress that you do not have to take part. If you do agree to take part, you will be asked to sign a consent form.

All personal details will be completely confidential.

Consent forms will be kept securely along with any notes taken, tape recordings and transcriptions. Although some quotes may be used to inform the final report these will in no way identify you.

The researcher conducting this focus group is __Chris Leigh__. You may reach her by email at clc@blueyonder.co.uk. The focus group should last no more than 40 minutes and you are free to stop taking part in the group at any time, and without giving a reason.

Thank you for reading this

The Illegals

FOCUS GROUP CONSENT FORM

Audience feedback on *The Illegals*

Name.....

- I understand what the focus group is about
- I have a copy of the information sheet to keep
- I have had the chance to ask questions about the study
- I understand my part in the study, and I know how long this will take
- I understand that personal information is strictly confidential
- I am happy to be in the study. No-one has put pressure on me
- I know that I can stop taking part in the study at any time
- I understand that the group will be recorded and I am happy for my views to be recorded

<input type="checkbox"/>

Signature

21st November 2008

The Illegals - what did you think?

Thank you for coming along to watch the play. We hope you found it interesting, informative, stimulating and challenging. We would like to ask you to spend a few minutes completing this short questionnaire – it will help us gauge your response and to plan how best we can use the play to raise awareness about the position of undocumented migrants.

Are you involved in any way in work with undocumented migrants? Yes No

1 Did you think the length of the play was

about right too long too short

2 Has the play raised your awareness about any of the following:

	Yes	No
(a) The difficulties faced by undocumented migrants	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(b) Their circumstances and the reasons they become 'illegal'	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(c) The UK economy needs the labour of undocumented migrants	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(d) Developing countries receive more money from the earnings of undocumented migrants than from development aid	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(e) The number of undocumented migrants who live and work in London	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

3 Has the play changed the way you view undocumented migrants

more positive less positive no change not sure

4 How has the play helped your understanding of your views towards undocumented migrants

I am clearer about how I feel about undocumented migrants
 I am less clear about how I feel about undocumented migrants
 there has been no change

5 What, if anything, have you learned from the play?

I am interested in finding out more about the work of Actors for Human Rights

I would like to join the mailing list for Actors for Human Rights

I can be contacted on: email _____ phone _____