

Welcome To Your Library case study

Summary

Welcome To Your Library is a project to increase opportunities for active engagement and participation by refugee communities in public library service planning and delivery. It aims to improve access to, and the quality of, services for all.

The project seeks to be a catalyst for change, increasing capacity of public libraries over time so this work becomes an integral part of what libraries do.

Background

In 2003, the [Paul Hamlyn Foundation](#) awarded funding to the [London Libraries Development Agency](#) to run a one-year pilot project in five library services in the London boroughs of Brent, Camden, Enfield, Merton and Newham. This built on previous award winning and pioneering work with refugees and asylum seekers in Merton's library service.

These boroughs were chosen because each one was in a different part of London, creating opportunities to work in partnership with the whole of London's infrastructure. They all had council services, voluntary organisations and others, with whom the library service could develop new links and partnerships locally.

Each one also had significant communities of refugees and asylum seekers, particularly those with children and young people, and recognised that they did not know enough about new and emerging communities in their boroughs. Finally the senior management of each of these boroughs demonstrated commitment to support development work and act on findings.

After the pilot project in London (2003-4), it was decided that Welcome To Your Library should be extended nationally (2005-7).

After a competitive selection process, the public library partners selected for this work in November 2005 are: the London Borough of Hillingdon working jointly with Healthy Hillingdon; Leicester City Council; Liverpool City Council; the London Borough of Southwark; and in Tyne and Wear, a consortium comprising five local authorities (including Newcastle City Council, Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council, Sunderland City Council and North and South Tyneside).

The work is being done in stages. It aims to share and spread learning and good practice and to demonstrate to policy makers and practitioners the key role public libraries play in nurturing learning, wellbeing and a sense of belonging.

Key issues

Barriers to use of public libraries by refugees and asylum seekers include:

- lack of awareness and understanding of services on offer
- library joining procedures that put asylum seekers in particular at a disadvantage
- lack of relevant and appropriate stock

Issues facing public library services include:

- inadequate community profile data and management information to plan, resource and deliver relevant services
- lack of staff awareness of relevant policy priorities and of key issues affecting refugee communities
- lack of staff confidence or skills to engage with this audience to overcome barriers to library use
- lack of proactive approach (and, therefore, experience) in developing effective local partnerships with refugee community organisations and others

Current policies defined by government and strategic bodies have provided both impetus and a framework for library service improvement in this work. Examples of this include 'shared priorities of central and local government' and [Every Child Matters](#) .

The key policy driver specific to library services is 'Framework for the Future: Libraries Learning and Information in the Next Decade', published by the [Department for Culture, Media and Sport \(DCMS\)](#) in 2003. Its three priorities for libraries are: the promotion of reading and informal learning; access to digital skills and services including e-government; and measures to tackle social exclusion, build community identity and develop citizenship.

Welcome To Your Library: activities undertaken in the pilot project

Work included:

- developing a project plan to meet aims and objectives at borough level within the overall Welcome To Your Library project
- mapping of refugee communities and support organisations, at the same time opening up dialogue and exploring opportunities for consultation and development
- identifying needs that could be met through public libraries and barriers to library use
- awareness training about issues facing refugees for over 200 library staff
- developing local partnerships with refugee community organisations and others
- structured taster visits and ICT sessions leading to over 300 new users
- simplifying joining procedures
- providing English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), community languages and reading support
- purchasing new stock with input from refugee communities
- storytelling events and workshops bringing together communities and cultures
- producing a final report for library service managers in each borough

The project co-ordinator also produced a report at the end of the year, with case studies and summary of key lessons learnt.

Key outcomes

Participation by refugee communities in service planning and delivery

Moving to a participative approach is at the heart of the project. For example, work over two years in Newham has led to direct and active involvement by the Somali community in stock selection and in the organisation of a Somali materials launch. This event attracted over 110 people from all over the country, with 50 people joining the library on the spot and over 100 items issued.

New service developments: work placements for refugees

The library service in Camden is offering up to 12 placements each year to refugees with work permits as well as helping people sit the new British citizenship exam.

The placements offer work experience and help to build self-esteem and an understanding of British working life. Refugees gain skills appropriate for any employer as well as an evidenced statement of achievement. They can also make use of Camden's library learning centres.

Securing further funding and raising the profile of public libraries

Identifying ways of funding work involving other partners has helped place public libraries into wider policy agendas. For example, the work placements in Camden libraries are EU-funded and the project involves a range of council departments and other international partners. In Newham, securing resources from neighbourhood renewal funds enabled the library service to invest £25k in foreign language material and gain community involvement in the selection process.

External Evaluation of the Pilot Project

External evaluators, Advice Development Project (now ADP Consultancy Ltd) wrote a report with recommendations to take work forward. This helped support the application for funding to extend the project nationally.

Resources

The Paul Hamlyn Foundation provided £119,000 for the pilot phase of the project, which ran from June 2003 to May 2004. This enabled the recruitment of five part-time project officers, one in each participating London borough library service, and a part-time project co-ordinator.

The national phase of Welcome To Your Library is supported with £250,000 from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation. This runs from June 2005 to November 2007. The project co-ordinator from the pilot project has been re-appointed full-time. There are no project officers as work will be delivered by existing staff in the participating library services.

Welcome To Your Library resources will be used to support, train and mentor existing library staff to bring about cultural change in planning, delivering and mainstreaming work with refugees and asylum seekers.

In addition, resources will support the active involvement of refugee communities in library service planning and delivery alongside other funding sources. They will fund the development of the information sharing and learning network, including the website, e-communications and regular events to bring all interested parties together. Finally they will help to ensure that lessons learnt are disseminated widely and applied cross-sector to work with other audiences.

Key people

The project officers in the pilot project acted as catalysts in each of the participating boroughs, bringing key issues to the attention of senior managers and other colleagues to enable change to start happening at a number of different levels.

Each project officer wrote a monthly diary and shared this with other team members and the project co-ordinator. Monthly team meetings provided a forum to share progress and difficulties and provide mutual team support.

Many of those involved in the pilot project, either as team members or in partner organisations may now be involved in supporting the development of learning across the country. The national phase of the project is also working in partnership with [‘The Network – tackling social exclusion in libraries, museums, archives and galleries’](#)

Critical success factors

Gathering relevant evidence and using this to strengthen policy arguments, secure necessary resources and manage change in public libraries has been essential to the success of Welcome to your Library. Equally vital has been the involvement of refugee umbrella and community organisations and others working to support refugees and the resources enabling them to be active participants in service development as well as users.

Another factor in the success of this was undertaking work incrementally and working with several local authorities at the same time to support shared learning in the public library sector. While disseminating findings widely in different policy settings proved useful, training on its own is not enough. It is important to ensure commitment and ‘buy-in’ from participating library service staff at all levels, which often means improving communication.

Doing it better?

Ideally, there would not be a time gap between the pilot project coming to an end and the commencement of project funding for the national phase of the work.

Using existing staff in public library services rather than recruitment of project officers for a limited period should help embed the work and free resources for staff development across the board

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