



Welcome to your Library



**An evaluation report by the
Advice Development Project
May 2004**

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Foreword

Reaching the most excluded, vulnerable and disadvantaged people in our communities is, by definition, a very challenging task for any service, anywhere. Few services try, and even fewer succeed, so I am particularly delighted to be able to report a real success story that has had a marked and, in my view, very moving impact on people's lives across our Capital City.

Developed and managed by the London Libraries Development Agency, an organisation of which I am inordinately proud to be Chair, the Welcome to Your Library project has been piloted in five London Borough Library Services – Brent, Camden, Merton, Newham and Enfield. Focussing on exploring how public libraries can offer, in partnership with others, a host of services for refugees and asylum seekers that begin to meet their diverse social, educational welfare needs, the Project has been a great success - and will now be rolled out across the Capital and beyond.

A wide range of relevant services have been developed, from satisfying key information needs on housing, health and local schools to using computers, reading in English and in mother tongue languages, accessing English classes and offering storytelling, cultural celebrations and other events that allow communities to come together and share experiences positively. The activities may be as diverse as the individuals helped, but the one thing all of these activities have in common is the public library – open to all, irrespective of status, free to use and with a statutory responsibility to serve everyone – equally. The public library remains, for many of us, a real signifier of a society that seeks to meet the aspirations of all – including those for whom every day life is particularly hard.

A lot has been learned during the six-months work of this project, from which other public library service providers, and a host of other services, can learn. This report summarises these key lessons and I would like to thank all those in the five public library services who have shown real determination to tackle an area that so many services find so very difficult.

I would also like to thank the Paul Hamlyn Foundation for being such a supportive partner in this endeavour and providing the funding to enable this work to take place, and to ALM London for supporting the evaluation and dissemination of this report.

Cllr Lyn Brown
Chair
London Libraries Development Agency

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Abbreviations

| | |
|------|--|
| ASR | Asylum seeker or refugee ¹ |
| LLDA | London Libraries Development Agency |
| NRF | Neighbourhood Renewal Fund |
| RCO | Refugee community organisation |
| VCO | Voluntary or community sector organisation |
| VCS | Voluntary and community sector |
| WTYL | Welcome to Your Library |

¹ The abbreviation ASR is our own 'invention', and is used to enhance concision.

Recommendations

1 Project management

1.1 Project structure

The further development stages of the project should prioritise involving refugee umbrella organisations and other non-library stakeholders in the planning and delivery of the project to ensure that it moves into the mainstream and takes greater account of wider social inclusion and policy objectives. This is likely to involve the creation of a stakeholder forum, with representation from appropriate national bodies.

1.2 Programme development

As the project develops, priority should be given to ensuring that national policy objectives such as DfES adult learning agendas etc are monitored and are taken into account in the planning of services. Consistent with this is a need to ensure that the project does not strive to lead on all initiatives supporting ASRs, but rather enhances mainstreaming by partnership working or acting in a consultancy capacity with other agencies.

A strategy needs to be developed to ensure that WTYL practice is mainstreamed into public libraries through:

- Greater consideration of user needs in the ongoing debate of one card for London libraries
- Sharing insights into barriers to joining
- Extending learning and development programmes to all library staff
- Sharing project insights with library managers to encourage management of change.

Consideration needs to be given to the effective cascading of good practice from this pilot stage, including the identification of achievable development and participation models that can be recommended to all libraries as suitable programmes of incremental ASR engagement, eg:

- Encouraging story-telling activities
- Supporting communities to develop written materials
- Hosting 'formal' public cultural events.

1.3 User involvement

Further consideration should be given to meaningful user involvement via reading groups and explicit consideration of how to involve ASRs in planning of services.

The effective involvement of locally based community organisations will only be possible if financial resources are available to support them. Future bids should ringfence a budget for local distribution to enable community participation.

User involvement and service planning will involve detailed assessment of users' and potential users' needs to ensure that provision mirrors a likely wide range of requirements, from eg basic reading materials to academic texts. Consideration should also be given to how the vocational needs of users are supported by networking with other agencies, such as formal education providers and RETAS.²

There is a valuable role for members of 'user communities' to critically assess the success of libraries in providing accessible and appropriate services to ASRs. The 'mystery shopping' exercise used in the preparation of this report could be developed and incorporated into library evaluation processes (see Appendix 1 for a summary of findings).

² RETAS supports the social and economic development of refugees and asylum seekers in the UK and at a European level by facilitating their access to education, employment and training opportunities and unlocking their potential both as individuals and members of the community. More information can be found at www.education-action.org/retas.asp.htm

1.4 Outreach

In order to effectively link with target communities libraries need to take services and information to them – libraries are often low on refugees' scale of priorities, partly because little is known about what they can offer.

1.5 Local emphasis

Links, partnerships and outreach can only effectively be sustained at borough level, subject to local ownership of activities and informed by knowledge of local conditions/terrain. In terms of making the case for mainstreaming, there is an argument for an outreach librarian in each branch delivering targets based on community profiles.

2 Library services management

2.1 Evaluation

Libraries traditionally have tended not to prioritise evaluation of their own work in order to use findings to strengthen policy arguments. There is a risk that libraries may perceive themselves as 'universal' services, ie 'being able to do everything for everybody', which could lead to a certain complacency. Outreach and promotion of services and of first phase project evaluation findings should be as wide as possible.

2.2 Stock [1]

There is a need to consider the financial implications of providing more stock in relevant languages and to ensure that stock purchase reflects (a) particular identified interests/needs and (b) levels of literacy/ engagement with reading in particular communities.

2.3 Stock [2]

Stock development discussions present an opportunity to think creatively about mixed funding, eg Newham, where a varied programme of stock development activities has been supported by a mix of mainstream (stock) funds, NRF and Sure Start money.

2.4 Stock [3]

Tactically, it is best to launch new stock collections in one or two selected/targeted branches and monitor issue figures.

2.5 Stock [4]

There is a need to strike a balance in relation to stock purchase between showing an established need based on a relatively settled community and retaining sufficient flexibility to reflect mobility of certain communities.³ 12 – 18 months might be regarded as a 'reasonable' period of settlement, ie long enough on which to base purchase decisions.

2.6 Linking with statutory reviews of service

Work with refugee and asylum seeker groups should contribute to Best Value activities as method of contributing to a shift of focus that will re-shape the library service, by:

- Considering key questions such as what do we do, whom do we do it for, why and how do we do it?
- Demonstrating project benefits and promoting these to other local authority departments⁴.

2.7 Information hubs

Activity so far makes the case for using libraries as central local authority co-ordinators of holistic needs assessment (ie on a range of services) and information storage regarding asylum seekers and refugees.

³ The transience/mobility of asylum seekers and refugee communities presents practical problems in terms of meeting needs promptly – by the time a community's presence and needs have been mapped, they might have moved either elsewhere in the borough or further afield.

⁴ Links to other statutory requirements might include library services drawing on WTYL data to support Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs).

3 Other local authority service management

Consideration should be given to methods of promoting WTYL projects internally within the council to ensure that there is effective communication between library departments and other relevant sections of the local authority.

4 Library policy bodies

4.1 Regional/cross-regional working

If the project extends beyond London, consideration should be given to practical methods of sharing information and practice that ensure equal participation of all nominated regions.

Within London there is scope for future links with current London-wide/LLDA led-initiatives, eg the linking of Read Routes project, a reader development initiative, with Refugee Week activities.⁵

4.2 ESOL resources

There is an ongoing role for existing sub-regional library consortia to co-ordinate negotiations with suppliers of ESOL materials at a regional and cross-regional level in order to capitalise on economies of scale.

⁵ Read Routes is a pan-London LLDA initiative, whose aim is "to take [readers] on a journey around London, whether by foot or via the pages of....favourite books for readers of all ages and abilities." The theme of Read Routes has now moved away from the original London theme but it is still worth emphasising the role of reading promotions in this area of work.

1 Introduction

In February 2004, the Advice Development Project (ADP) was commissioned by the London Libraries Development Agency to carry out an evaluation of Welcome to your Library (WTYL), a pilot project set up in five London boroughs to develop activities and approaches to increase the accessibility and engagement of asylum seekers refugees (ASRs) in public library services.⁶

Welcome to Your Library, a one-year project funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, was designed to build on previous initiatives in the field, and in particular Merton Libraries work with refugees and asylum seekers for which they won the Libraries Change Lives Award 2001.

The project fits with LLDA's wider social inclusion agenda in the sense that it deals with:

- Information provision
- Learning
- Open 'anonymous' use

Boroughs were nominated on the basis of (a) Merton as 'pioneer' plus (b) one each from areas co-terminous with Learning & Skills Council (and also took into account the need to mix inner and outer London boroughs).

It is generally recognised that the pilot project was undertaken within a very limited time frame. Project officer posts were part-time and translated as six-month posts in 'real' time. This has impacted on the ability of the project to embed practice into the mainstream.

At the time of writing, the project co-ordinator and the LLDA as 'commissioning' body are involved in seeking, negotiating and applying for further funding to continue and expand the project.

ADP's findings, contained in this report, are intended to complement evaluation carried out by WTYL staff members, which will be collected in a series of separate reports.

In addition to carrying out evaluation work, ADP was also commissioned to provide consultancy and support to project staff in relation both to their own internal evaluation activities and sustainability issues such as discussing and applying for funds.

⁶ The Advice Development Project is a consultancy organisation that offers support and development services to agencies providing information and advice.

2 Methodology

2.1 General considerations

There were notable similarities across boroughs in terms both of approach/project planning and findings. With this in mind, and taking account of the fact that our primary brief has been to carry out a 'bird's eye' strategic review, we have tended to amalgamate observations from across the project to provide a general picture and to 'drop in' case-studies and examples from individual boroughs as appropriate. For more detailed local information, we would refer you to the WTYL project co-ordinator's report.

2.2 Desktop research

There are relatively few publications and published research documents dealing specifically with the public library service needs of asylum seekers and refugees and how these are or should be supported.⁷ As such, much of the desk research elements of the project focused on assessing general library policy documents dealing with wider social inclusion issues, such as Framework for the Future and Open for All, and reports on specific areas of support need, such as learning, with which library services have a link.^{8 9}

Certain key issues were identified that need to be considered when designing welcoming/accessible services to the relevant target groups. These issues are applicable to a wider constituency than refugees and asylum seekers and include

- Staff skills and attitude
- Marketing
- Signage
- Physical layout
- Flexible use of space
- User involvement¹⁰

⁷ However, a particular mention should be given to guidance material published by The Network, a partnership of public libraries, museums, archives, other organisations and individuals committed to tackling social exclusion. See www.seapn.org.uk for more information.

⁸ Framework for the Future was produced by the Department for Culture Media and Sport in collaboration with the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA). Open for All examines the public library's capacity to tackle social exclusion.

⁹ An example of a publication on a 'wider' issue is 'Educational Advice & Guidance for Young Refugees and Asylum Seekers' – see bibliography for further details.

¹⁰ See Audit Commission (undated) for users' and non-users' comments on feelings of class/educational alienation.

Project materials examined included promotional documents (flyers etc), project officers' reports and the project co-ordinator's minutes of meetings with external stakeholders.

2.3 Consultees

Consultees, listed in the acknowledgements section above, included representatives of the following constituencies:

- Sponsoring organisation – LLDA
- Funding organisation – Paul Hamlyn Foundation
- Project staff – project officers and their line managers¹¹
- Other library service staff members
- Other local authority departments
- External stakeholders and specialists
- Refugee community organisations based in project boroughs

Who is a stakeholder?

In two cases the line between 'experts' and 'stakeholders' we consulted has become blurred, in that individuals originally consulted for their expertise have become engaged in training delivery as part of/under the auspices of the project.

The role of library managers

It is important to take account of the perspectives of project managers, given their multiple roles:

- Direct beneficiaries of WTYL activities as permanent managers of library services
- Involved with, but not directly responsible to project co-ordinator, sponsor (LLDA) or funder for delivery of project outputs
- Best placed to devise strategies for mainstreaming good practice

Because of this complex and integral involvement, managers' observations are incorporated throughout the body of the report, rather than in a separate section.

¹¹ Line managers were existing library services staff members whose management time was re-funded from the WTYL budget. As such, they were not employed by the project.

2.4 Advisory group

ADP nominated an advisory group to contribute to project research and comment on our own findings. Representatives of community organisations with the following profiles were invited to take part:

- *Croydon Community Care Service*: Agency offering a range of services such as social welfare advice and community transport to settled migrant and ASR communities
- *Eritrean Community in Haringey*: Agency offering a range of services including social welfare advice and learning support to settled and ASR members of the Eritrean community and others
- *Limehouse Project*: Agency offering a range of services including social welfare advice and vocational support and training to members of settled migrant communities, primarily ESOL-speaking Bangladeshi women.

The organisations were selected on the grounds that staff members or service users taking part would be closer to or better able to empathise with the perspectives of ASRs. All agencies took part in a 'mystery shopping' exercise to gauge the accessibility of library services in WTYL boroughs (see Appendix 1 for a summary of findings). Some agencies took part in further activities such as canvassing service users about their general library usage patterns, commenting on a draft of this report, and providing general comments about the potential benefits of libraries for ASRs.

In order to avoid possible friction, we ensured that none of the advisory group members was based in a pilot borough. We also chose venues for mystery shopping visits on the basis of two criteria:

(a) They were not branches within which project officers were based – we hoped this might enable project staff to consider the extent to which project good practice guidance had travelled beyond their 'base branch', where relevant.¹²

(b) They were based in areas within boroughs most likely to accommodate ASR communities – this criterion was applied in recognition of the disparities that exist between individual branches within boroughs in relation to awareness of, contact with and service delivery to ASR communities.

¹² Not all project officers were based within library branches.

2.5 Project support activities

In addition to project evaluation, ADP was contracted to provide support activities to project staff in two main areas:

- Preparation of 'in-house' evaluation materials, eg commenting on project officers' draft reports etc
- Discussion on tactical approaches to funders and assistance with draft applications, as appropriate

Although resources to cover these activities represented a fairly small element of ADP's workplan, support services were offered on an open-ended 'as needed' basis, and in practice could be easily accommodated within the overall schedule of work. The specific nature of the support activities provided has been treated as confidential and is not discussed in this report.

3 Stakeholder analysis

3.1 Context

Refugees and asylum seekers are not a homogenous collection of individuals and communities with different skills, knowledge and needs. What they *share* is the experience of flight, dislocation and loss.

The impact of dislocation is the baseline for understanding needs – relationships/community networks will have been fractured or broken and self-esteem damaged, which affects capacity for inter-personal and wider social engagement. Therefore, a basic principle underpinning much work with these communities is the need to support the re-building of networks of family, social and community relationships.

3.2 Barriers to ASR use of library services

Stakeholders identified a number of barriers to ASRs making use of public library services

- Lack of familiarity with the environment
- Having to manage urgent 'survival' needs
- Lack of familiarity with libraries – perhaps coming from semi-literate cultures
- Lack of English
- Insufficient assessment of communities' needs/skills informing library resourcing and community involvement strategy.

Community groups identified that:

- BME groups have very little involvement with public libraries. It is a place that may offer very little in terms of an information point. This can be due to/associated with illiteracy as well as little or no English.

3.3 General recommendations on working with asylum seekers and refugees

Libraries exist to serve the public and they should aim to provide access to as wide a range of support services as possible. As local resources, libraries should take account of the needs of local communities. As such, they should make arrangements as flexible as possible. If they do not do this, they are acting in a manner that could be regarded as being implicitly racist.

Libraries should provide staff with clear guidance on working with asylum seekers, and proactively explain, eg joining procedures, as an asylum seeker might not know how to ask about such issues. Staff also need to know how much flexibility they have in relation to things such as number of documents needed to support applications for membership. The starting point needs to be a commitment to working with ASRs, from which specific good practice guidance can be developed.

Camden Public Libraries Users Group describes libraries as having the potential to act as "adult literacy centres and organised information exchanges" for ASRs, and also refers in wider terms to the value of public libraries as "relatively benign spaces where even (or particularly) the excluded, the needy and the occasionally dissident may find a welcome".¹³

In addition, community groups identified that:

- Any public library should hold books and information that are useful to local people – these can be mother tongue books as well as books (in English) that may develop their literacy skills
- Are libraries getting their selection of books right? Who selects them and how?
- Libraries need to engage in an attempt to make partnerships with local community centres and schools for wider participation. This can be extended by providing outreach interaction to the public (not just a mobile library).
- Additionally, publicity material should be issued to all local residents about the services they provide. This should be easily understood by everyone and written in different languages.
- Libraries should be inviting and should be designed so that they are approachable by all members of the public (ie not hidden away).

¹³ Selwyn, T. in CPLUG (2000), pp. 45 & 48.

3.4 The needs of ASRs and the role of libraries in meeting them

Libraries have multiple uses/values for ASRs:

- *Information providers*: libraries should and do act as sources of information on a range of relevant issues such as jobs, health promotion, GPs, sports resources, new skills, eg DIY
- *Training and education*: libraries should provide or broker access to training in relevant skills. A critical skill is English language acquisition, particularly in the light of citizenship requirements. Included in training should be supplementary education (eg after school homework clubs) for school-age children
- *Premises*: Many library branches have the potential to make space available for community activities, and should bring different communities together under one roof
- *Cultural identity*: library resources can help people recognise and celebrate their cultural identity
- *Brokering access to services*: libraries can facilitate access to training, employment, leisure opportunities, ICT etc, which will have wider social effects, eg keeping teenagers engaged in meaningful activity
- *Providing identity*: libraries provide a sense of social identity/belonging for ASRs. A library card is often the first formal document an individual can obtain that formally demonstrates their membership of a UK institution
- *A safe place*: many unaccompanied teenage asylum seekers are housed in hostel or B & B accommodation – libraries therefore represent a safe, neutral space to spend time in
- *Mirroring experience* - stock choices should not be limited to selecting texts in relevant languages – content is also important. In other words, ASRs are interested in books about the refugee experience
- *Supplementing schools*: public libraries can supplement schools' educational role and in-house library facilities. Young people introduced to books or ideas at school can pursue their interests in public libraries, and may be able to engage family members at the same time
- *Promoting integration*: libraries have a key role in promoting integration, ie assisting individuals in their transition to the 'mainstream'. A key method of doing this is sharing cultural resources with the wider world – art and culture can bring different communities together.

3.5 Current library usage

Croydon Community Care Service (CCCS)

CCCS carried out a semi-informal snapshot questionnaire survey of its own service users to establish general library usage patterns and perceptions of service in their local branches, which were located in various parts of South London. This was distinct from CCCS's assessment of accessibility of a pilot borough library service. The mixed gender survey group was composed of eleven individuals from a variety of countries of origin other than the UK. Respondents were a mixture of ASRs, 'free' migrants and second-generation members of BME migrant communities.

Responses were as follows:

Perceptions

- All respondents knew where their local library was located
- In all but one case, staff were found to be helpful and/or friendly, and one respondent noted that staff speaking their mother tongue (Spanish) were always available
- Two respondents found the environment unsatisfactory
- Two respondents commented on stock shortages in Punjabi and Urdu and one noted that while Punjabi titles were available, they had to be ordered, which entailed a long wait to access them

Usage

- Two respondents did not use public libraries at all, and one used them "rarely"
- Three respondents stated they did not use library IT facilities, while four responded that they did. One stated that they only used the library for internet access and felt that broadband should be installed
- Two respondents stated that they used the library to access public information
- One respondent stated that they used the library for "college", ie study, and another referred to "reference"

4 Findings

4.1 Baselines

Knowledge of ASR communities at the outset

The general picture in terms of what was known locally about ASRs and RCOs at the start of the project tended to conform to the following observations from one borough:

"Prior to the project we had limited contact with refugee or asylum seeker communities. It had been known that these were many and diverse, but little detailed information was available about them."

Specifically, information on the following issues often tended to be missing, patchy or hard to access:

- Demographic data
- Location
- Language needs
- Preferred information formats
- Best methods of reaching and promoting services to ASPs
- Types of service wanted

Brent project staff observed that *"because there is no central co-ordinating unit dealing with refugees and asylum seekers 'in the round', it has been very hard to gain statistical information from elsewhere in the local authority."* To a greater or lesser extent, this problem has been encountered across other boroughs

Brent further noted that in terms of linking particular communities to specific localities/individual library branches, it has been difficult to obtain sufficiently detailed statistics and to be able to distinguish among/between refugees, asylum seekers and economic migrants.

Another borough's project officer noted that there is much rhetoric about community profiling, but that it is rarely actually done in any degree of detail beyond ward profiling in relation to local political/council activity and national census statistics.

4.2 Borough workplans and timetables

There was remarkable symmetry between actual phases of project development in the boroughs and good practice guidance on engagement recommended by stakeholders.

As such the scale and nature of project achievements, which tend to be related to data collection, development of networks and initial partnership initiatives, and negotiations on stock issues, reflect what was possible in the time available. It should also be noted that project officers' managers were invariably at full stretch with other responsibilities, and therefore unable to 'fill in' on the days when project officers were not working.

The pattern of project activities within individual boroughs tended to conform to the following sequence in each borough (italicised ones were carried out by all):

- *Mapping ASR communities and RCOs* - this involved research into existing information resources (local authority and elsewhere)
- *Making contact with groups*
- *Promoting services to ASRs via RCOs and organising taster sessions/library visits*
- Capacity-building RCOs (assistance with funding etc)
- Facilitating partnership projects with VCOs, social enterprises and RCOs to deliver linked services
- *Liaising with other parts of library service and/or other local authority departments*
- *Follow-on promotion* (flyers in relevant languages etc)
- Organising staff training

One borough found that its resources were effectively used up with activities aimed at engaging an initial 'priority cluster' of key ASR communities, which illustrates a practical tension between equity (sharing resources across all groups) and the need to actually deliver tangible results with limited resources.

One stakeholder was concerned that running a time-limited project without having investigated follow-on funding early enough might be worse than not having instigated the project all, because of expectations created that may not be fulfilled in the future.

4.3 Key findings: Issues, activities, achievements and obstacles

Mapping and networking

According to project managers in all boroughs, the project has provided valuable mapping information about ASRs and RCOs. Comments included:

- Major benefit in having a project officer who has time to map refugee RCOs and liaise with them
- Mapping information has uncovered data about BME communities beyond asylum seeker and refugee communities, eg has identified much larger Chinese community than was known, whose reading stock is heavily used
- Creating new links with RCOs and other voluntary and community sector organisations, which branch and other senior managers did not previously have the capacity to cultivate, has wider benefits such as partnership initiatives, eg Brent Youth Partnership literacy project

Staff composition

In boroughs where the existing staff profile is ethnically/culturally diverse, the communities represented might not match those of the local population, which is in a process of constant flux. Many staff members are second or third-generation migrants and it should not be assumed that they are particularly sensitive to particular issues affecting asylum seekers and refugees regarding the impact of a new environment and possible obstacles to negotiating it. In other words, there is a risk of complacency, ie that a multi-ethnic staff team will automatically mean a more welcoming environment.

Stock

All boroughs have to balance a range of demands from within a finite stock budget. However, local mapping of ASR communities' main areas of residence within boroughs makes more accurate stock planning and purchase a greater possibility.

The transience/mobility of ASR communities presents practical problems in terms of meeting needs promptly – by the time a community's presence and needs have been mapped, they might have moved either elsewhere in the borough or further afield.

Stock development is an area with significant scope for information sharing to minimise duplication of effort, eg research into sources of cheap and/or easily available materials in relevant languages.¹⁴

Joining procedures

Enfield has introduced simplified joining procedures, ie reduced the number of supporting documents necessary to make an application.

Cultural integration

Active efforts have been made by project officers to promote the social integration of individual communities via cultural and explanatory events such as activities related to Refugee Week and Black History Month, and in the case of one borough, supporting unaccompanied asylum seeker pupils to put on presentations to their peer group.

Enfield has worked with the Traveller Support Service to set up two days in the libraries celebrating Romany culture for eastern European Roma children and their classmates.

Volunteering – from user to worker

Encouraging ASRs to volunteer in public libraries opens up multiple possibilities for sustainability, and at least one borough has pioneered this. Not only do the individuals concerned gain skills and the opportunity to deliver a public service, their actual presence is also likely contribute to greater use by other members of ASR communities.

User involvement

Camden project activities included encouraging the involvement of an ASR community via users'/readers' groups. Kentish Town library, which has a dormant group, provided an opportunity for Somali community to become involved. However, it is important to consider how to widen inclusion to other communities such as settled minority and 'indigenous' English groups.

Brent suggested that there would be value in more systematic collection of users' views via, eg focus groups (identified within RCOs) that would act in an advisory capacity on issues such as stock purchase and other improvements to service.

Community groups stressed the need for libraries to enter into active partnership by providing/seeking funding to enable community groups to

¹⁴ For example, Bright Books Supplies, whose primary markets are public libraries, schools & prisons and who also lease as well as sell materials – ideal for meeting the needs of transient groups.

lead on initiatives such as after-school clubs in the library premises. They stressed the need for such sessions to be staffed by workers from the community groups to encourage access.

Engaging non-users

Discussion with an advisory group member on other, linked issues, namely access to learning resources, suggests that certain community representatives may block access of some of their members to public services. How can we be sure that the spokespeople for a given community are not 'shielding' non-user groups because of their own agendas?

One project staff member suggested that one possible strategy for engaging the community across the generations might be to start by focusing services on children, ie using parental aspirations for their children as a means of making contact with adults and encouraging them into library use. This also has the advantage that it is easier to 'find' children, as they have more contact with other statutory services, ie education/schools.

Another method might be to target users of given RCOs via questionnaire and then have discussions with respondents who have indicated that they do not currently use library services to find out why and consider how accessibility could be improved.

Complementing other local authority services

In Camden, the project's focus has been to encourage people who support refugees and asylum seekers to talk to each other – both within the library service and elsewhere, ie different council departments and beyond, eg advice workers, youth centres etc.

However, project staff found a lack of inter-departmental communication within the local authority. The project officer carried out extensive 'manual' mapping/analysis only to discover that the Leisure Department's Performance and Policy unit had mapping software. Also, multi-lingual information is produced separately by different departments with a lack of consideration that libraries could act as a central co-ordinating information hub.

There have also been problems with Camden Information Service, which is reluctant to distribute project materials in languages other than English because of concerns about divergence from existing publication standards.

But more positively the link between the project and education refugee work has been extremely effective.

The council's interpreting services have contributed to identifying widely spoken community languages to inform the printing of multi-lingual leaflets providing basic information about the library.

Extending good practice across library service

The most common form of intra-library service cascading of good practice tends to be training programmes for staff, often delivered by external agents such as consultants or VCS bodies.

Enfield organised a series of six day-long training sessions for all permanent staff that focused on inclusion and what this means.

In general there have been mixed findings by project staff regarding the extent of interest and involvement of the whole library service. For example, in Brent, where although there is now pan-service training planned, the level of interest has varied according to the demographic composition of each branch, ie branches serving less culturally diverse communities have been less interested. In contrast, in Newham the project has engaged the senior library managers' team with tangible practical results, namely enhanced stock planning and purchase.

Camden provides a good example of libraries meeting wider ASR needs by making flexible use of library premises out of hours. Queen's Crescent library opens on Sundays to provide space for ESOL classes for Somali adults followed by children's homework classes.

Levering in external resources to support services

As one example amongst a number, Newham has supported a varied programme of stock development activities with a mix of mainstream/internal stock funds, NRF and Sure Start money.

Monitoring

There was variation from borough to borough in terms of levels of collection/analysis of 'new user' figures from relevant communities.

Also, a relative lack of consideration of how to reach non-users was identified.

4.4 Accessibility findings

Accessibility was assessed by mystery shopping visits. The exercise was intended to provide a snapshot of services in the pilot boroughs for contextual information only, and was not an attempt to either 'catch project staff out' or imply shortcomings on their part.

Summary findings are presented at Appendix I.

5 Conclusion

Overall, the strategies and approaches developed and adopted by individual boroughs and the project overall have been consistent with the assessment of needs and recommendations of stakeholders, 'experts' and advisory group members. Equally, the project has met the aims it set for itself, which were defined in general terms as follows:

By the end of May 2004, to:

- *Achieve sustainability*
- *Pilot at least one new initiative in each participating borough*
- *Make recommendations for future library plans*
- *Increase participation in and awareness of library services by refugees and asylum seekers*
- *Develop new refugee partnerships to support library work*
- *Disseminate lessons learnt.*¹⁵

Our evaluation identified clear overall gains for stakeholders. These are summarised below.

ASR communities

- Simplified joining procedures in some boroughs
- Access to linked facilities such as learning resources
- Greater familiarity with the library environment
- Engagement in 'integrating activities', eg Refugee Week events
- Increased library usage and membership

RCOs

- Enhanced engagement in planning of services/stock to meet users' needs
- Opportunity to educate library services staff about ASRs' needs

Library services

- Detailed data about ASR communities – size, location and needs
- Development of networks of new relationships with RCOs and other VCOs
- Enhanced sensitivity and staff skills to serve target communities
- Opportunities for cost-free mainstreaming, eg reprioritising stock budget priorities

¹⁵ WTYL explanatory document posted on the London Libraries Development Agency website www.llda.org.uk/files/welcome_to_your_library.doc

Other local authority services

- Potential access to (embryonic) library ASR data hub. In particular, Camden has investigated methods of carrying out more detailed demographic information gathering via refinements to joining forms, which will enable data sharing with other local authority departments
- Opportunity for development of complementary service delivery with libraries to meet wider range of ASR needs.

Library policy bodies

- Ability to draw on project as good practice example to adapted and used elsewhere
- Enhanced profile for library services in terms of their ability to take on a new role (community profiling), adapt to meet the needs of 'new' communities and widen their role as agents of social inclusion

Specific recommendations regarding potential courses of future action open to various stakeholder groups are provided at the beginning of this report. It is worth adding that it will be important to disseminate detailed project good practice examples and achievements, as detailed in the project co-ordinator's report, as widely as possible. In particular, the project provides a model in relation to the following issues:

- Community profiling
- Encouraging partnership and joint working between the statutory and voluntary sector
- Linking libraries with other local authority services
- Diversifying the range and nature of library services
- Celebrating the cultural resources of asylum seeker and refugee communities
- Promoting community integration

Outputs were consistently high across all boroughs and a strong commitment to project aims was expressed by the commissioning agency, the funder, all members of project staff and key external stakeholders. However, it is clear that further funding will be needed to embed project achievements, and in particular support the 'social argument' in favour of future mainstream local authority assistance with robust data regarding numbers of joiners from 'new' and emerging communities. We wish the project luck with its pending funding applications.

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Appendix 1 Accessibility findings

Accessibility of library services for ASR users was assessed by mystery shopping visits. The exercise was intended to provide a snapshot of services in the pilot boroughs for contextual information only, and was not an attempt to either 'catch project staff out' or imply shortcomings on their part.

Summary findings are presented below.

| Library | External signage | Internal signage | Environment | ESOL stock and information | Joining procedures | Customer care | Other |
|---------|---|--|--|--|---|---|---|
| 1 | Unclear location and only one external sign visible | Multi-lingual welcome sign only; no indication that services are free; no sign to upstairs section | Well-indicated and welcoming children's area | Good ESOL selection but not signposted. Also, all labelling in English, so help would be needed to understand classification | 2 supporting documents needed or sponsor's endorsement – finding a sponsor might be difficult | Friendly, helpful ethnically mixed staff team | PCs only accessible with card, which is only issued to members |
| 2 | Lack of street signage, but identity of library clear from outside front door | ESOL stock signposted in a number of languages | | Content of information useful (eg leaflets on Skills for Life for refugees) but only available in English; v. small stock selection (c. 5%) and very few appropriate CDs – nearly all English language | | Staff not friendly at all – an asylum seeker would find it difficult to ask for information | All PCs open access, most with internet access, but all software in English. Also, no-one available to assist with using PCs. |

| Library | External signage | Internal signage | Environment | ESOL stock and information | Joining procedures | Customer care | Other |
|----------------|---|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| 3 | Premises hard to find; no external direction visible; not clear where it is until front door | Clear signs for children's section, videos etc | OK, but not v. spacious | No signs for or evidence of either ESOL stock or information | Leaflet not informative and only in English. 2 x supporting document needed. | When enquirer asked about joining procedures for ASRs, staff member did not ask what their mother tongue was | General perception that ASR would not be welcome unless UK status "correct", ie sufficient to meet joining evidence requirements |
| 4 | Sign on building hard to read | Unclear and no arrows indicating location of resources | Insufficient seating; unwelcoming, especially for families | No evidence of books in other languages | When enquirer asked how an ASR could join, staff member simply handed out a form, no particular sensitivity to possibility that person might be 'new to the system'. | No staff at reception or in children's area despite waiting some time; | Small under-resourced branch with no infrastructure to support 'special groups' |
| 5 | No street signage evident, but building well-marked in lettering visible from across the street | Clear signs to ESOL resources | Reasonably large space, stock clearly labelled. | Resources included books, videos newspapers and leaflets about the library in a number of ESOL languages | Layout of form compares favourably with others (A5) | When asked about joining procedures for ASRs and ESOL resources, librarian asked enquirer's first language and country of origin and helped to select appropriate leaflets | |