Welcome To Your Library

Final Report, December 2007

L McKinlay

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Vision statement for Welcome To Your Library
Welcome To Your Library is a national project connecting public libraries with refugees and asylum seekers. By increasing opportunities for participation, Welcome To Your Library aims to improve access to and quality of public library services for everyone.

Aims of Welcome To Your Library
We will connect public libraries and refugee communities to nurture learning, well-being and a sense of belonging for all.

We will achieve this through:

- PARTICIPATION of refugee communities throughout the work
- PARTNERSHIPS to raise awareness and increase public library use
- CONFIDENT, TRAINED library staff
- SHARING GOOD PRACTICE based on evidence
- ADVOCACY for public library work with refugees and asylum seekers

Background to Welcome To Your Library
Funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation and co-ordinated through the London Libraries Development Agency, the Welcome To Your Library pilot project took place in the London boroughs of Brent, Camden, Enfield, Merton and Newham in 2003-4.

In 2005, a further £250,000 from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation enabled Welcome To Your Library to extend the project nationally to the end of 2007. By this time we expect activities to have become an integral part of public library work.

Who are the partners?
After a competitive selection process, five additional public library partners are participating in the national project:

- London Borough of Hillingdon working with Healthy Hillingdon
- Leicester City Council
- Liverpool City Council
- London Borough of Southwark
- Tyne & Wear (a consortium comprising councils in Newcastle, Gateshead, North and South Tyneside and Sunderland)

Local factors

Gateshead is working as part of a Tyne & Wear consortium with Newcastle, North Tyneside, South Tyneside and Sunderland. A key introductory action has been for members of the consortium to develop mechanisms for working and communicating effectively with each other.

Set in the bustling conurbation of Tyneside, Gateshead stretches almost 13 miles along the south bank of the River Tyne and covers an area of 55 square miles making it the largest in area of the five Tyne & Wear authorities with a population of around 190,000 (ONS, Mid 2006 estimate), with a low BME population of only 0.2% (ONS 2001 Census) Gateshead is an area of contrasts; half the borough is rural in comparison with a large urban centre.

Asylum seeker figures across the Tyne and Wear consortium are not high and statistics produced by the North of England Refugee Service in May 2007 stated that there were 394 individual asylum seekers living in NASS supported accommodation in Gateshead in November 2006.

The role for the WTYL project in Gateshead was to inform the wider local community regarding asylum seeker issues, and focus RAS employee training on libraries within communities where the majority of refugees and asylum seekers are currently living. By participating in the project the Gateshead was keen that WTYL would build a local model for community engagement with other hard to reach groups.

Strategic context

In Gateshead the WTYL project was and is driven by the following National and Local policies:

National

Culture and Libraries are at the heart of the Government's agenda and are seen as key players in supporting sustainable communities, community engagement and digital citizenship. A number of policy drivers and initiatives have been developed by the Government, Department of Culture, Media and Sports (DCMS), Museums Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) - the lead strategic agency for the sector, to take these plans forward. These include:

- **Shared Priorities –**joint statement by DCMS and the Local Government Association to improve local services
- **Local Area Agreements (LAAs)** – improving coordination between central and local government through Local Strategic Partnerships. The relevant strategic partnership for Libraries is Safer Stronger Communities and Culture Partnership
- **DCMS** Public Library Service Standards (currently under review)
- **MLA initiatives/research/improvement strategies** – these include research into procurement models, toolkits for Community Engagement, Social Inclusion and Cultural Improvement Strategy.
- **Framework for the Future (F4F)–** published by DCMS in 2003, is the Government's 10 year vision for public libraries. MLA was commissioned to

prepare action plans to take this forward. This framework builds the case for work across local and central government to make sure that the full potential of libraries is realised. This is reflected in the strategy.

Culture and Libraries are also at the heart of the strategic framework within Gateshead Council:

- **Vision 2030 –** Gateshead Strategic Partnership's vision for the borough – sets out the long term vision for Gateshead. The Library strategy will demonstrate that libraries can contribute to the Big Ideas outlined.
- **Local Area Agreement –** Gateshead Strategic Partnership's delivery plan for Vision 2030. This plan covers 3 years.
- **Corporate Plan –** is the Council's delivery plan for Vision 2030. This delivery plan covers 3 years.
- **Cultural Strategy** – "Spreading Our Wings" is the local cultural strategy for Gateshead. It describes the vision for Culture and focuses on the specific challenges to be addressed between 2005 and 2010.
- **Equal Opportunities Policy**
  Each individual within Gateshead's diverse population is entitled to be treated fairly and with dignity and respect.
  The Equal Opportunities Policy outlines the Council's commitment to ensuring that all service users have equal access to the Council's services. Therefore the Council will ensure that the services we provide reflect the needs of Gateshead's diverse population.
- **Local Government Standard** – Gateshead Council has recently achieved level 3 and is working to achieve level 5 by the end of March 2008
- **Racist Incident Policy 2004**
  Supporting the Equal Opportunities Policy is Gateshead's Racist Incident Policy. It does this by clearly outlining the procedure for dealing with racial harassment or racist incidents against service users. Service users will be made aware of their own rights and responsibilities and all racist incidents will be dealt with firmly and confidentially with full support for victims.

Gateshead Project Plan Objectives

Gateshead Libraries aim to engage with refugee and asylum seeker communities and by doing so improve access and quality of service to this group. The project will build a local model for community engagement; aiming to make use of the recently published MLA Community Engagement tool kit, thus building a local model in Gateshead for engagement with other groups.

The key objectives are to:

1. Work as part of the Tyne & Wear consortium to deliver the project regionally with a structured and co-ordinated approach;

2. Map the current services and groups currently working with Refugees and Asylum seekers in Gateshead and establish an effective communication system;

3. Promote awareness and encourage use of the library services by refugee and asylum communities;

4. Provide suitable training to improve employees' skills and confidence to understand the needs of asylum seekers and refugees and respond to them appropriately and effectively;

5. Provide consultation and involvement opportunities for refugees and asylum seekers within the service;

6. Undertake targeted projects to engage refugees and asylum seekers with the service and to Inform the wider community of asylum seeker issues;

Summary of Progress under the Key Objectives

Key Objective 1: Work as part of the Tyne & Wear consortium to deliver the project regionally with a structured and co-ordinated approach

Monthly meetings are attended by all 5 members of the consortium with pre-agreed agendas and support from MLA North East. In addition bi-monthly meetings have focussed on specific topics of interest such as volunteers with guest speakers, which have proved informative and useful.
Consortium working has opened up effective channels of communication, which has facilitated the achievement of various consortium wide initiatives such as an established 'Resource Sharing Policy' and a database of foreign language stock held by each authority.

The consortium structure has been invaluable in the sharing of learning, information and best practice and members have also been made aware of regional initiatives and through the consortium have a stronger profile enforced by the attendance at regional conferences such as 'Regional Refugee Integration' and 'Keeping Culture Alive'.

MLA North East facilitated a training needs audit for the 5 authorities early on in the project which formed a basis for the consortium to work together on an effective region wide programme of training collectively, making use of the expertise provided by John Vincent of the Network. Sunderland, South Tyneside and Gateshead have hosted very successful training days, covered in more depth in **Objective 4.**

Key Objective 2: Map the current services and groups currently working with Refugees and Asylum seekers in Gateshead and establish an effective communication system.

Due to the geographical closeness of the Tyne & Wear authorities most support groups have an overlap between councils with many of the official support organisations for example North East Refugee Service being located in Newcastle.
The groups are now listed on Gateshead Council's Clubs and Societies file at:
http://online.gateshead.gov.uk/societies/index.asp and Newcastle City Council's City Eye.

As a direct result of WTYL Gateshead Libraries have now set up and made good working partnerships with colleagues across the council working with RAS communities such as; Refugee and Asylum Seeker Support Services and Gateshead Council's Diversity Forum. As well as colleagues in Economic Development and Adult Education

who are working on joint initiatives such as career and job advice sessions at Sunderland Road Library.

In addition we have close contact with partners in the voluntary sector through GVOC, Empower Gateshead and Gateshead Community Network.

Key Objective 3: Promote awareness and encourage use of the library services by refugee and asylum communities

A key driver in the promotion of awareness is the raising of Libraries profile by attendance at events such as;

(image)

- **Refugee Week** Libraries attended both the Launch at the Sage Gateshead and the end of week celebrations at Gateshead Civic Centre with information stalls and mobile registration desk. Explore Music had a constant presence at events at the Sage and designed and distributed promotional material on the services available including access to world music collections. Libraries across the borough held displays and based class visits on awareness and stories from other cultures.
- **Sugar & Spice Festival**
  An arts festival to commemorate the 200th year of the abolition of slavery.
  Writer in residence Sheree Mack also attended reading groups throughout the borough to explore her work with the readers of Gateshead.
- **African Showcase** event at Bensham Grove Community Association attended by the ICT Learning officer who gave a presentation on Internet security and the peoples network.
- **Citizenship Taster session** held at 'Head works' in the Central Library with access to Life in Britain ' software and ICT support.
- **Family Learning Fun Day** at Gateshead leisure Centre.
- **Mini Mela** Libraries attended the Mini Mela held at Gateshead Civic Centre with storytelling for Under5s and display of dual language picture books.
- **Eid** celebrations for children to mark the end of Ramadan at the Civic Centre with storytelling and craft activities.

Involvement in such events are now firmly established and will be planned on an annual basis and will link with other national, regional and local initiatives for example Black History Month, Refugee Week, International Women's Day, Adult Learners Week, Family Learning Week, Summer Reading Challenge, Local History Month etc.

Bookstart and its associated projects have also been important in raising awareness of the service. Meetings were held with the Bookstart co-ordinator and as a result packs were ordered with dual language books for schools with pupils from RAS communities. As the packs also contain invitations to join the library this again is hoped will encourage other family members to join.

Fiction Collection
A number of special collections of fiction have been purchased and are currently touring the borough. The 'Chains' collection tying in with the abolition of slavery has been to several locations across Gateshead and proved very successful.
In addition we have also purchased a collection we have entitled **'Small Island'** intended for younger people to explore the experiences of and issues faced by refugees and asylum seekers.

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Research has shown that a barrier to the use of library services by RAS communities is lengthy and complicated joining procedures. Work has been undertaken into reviewing the joining procedures of neighbouring authorities and Gateshead is exploring ways of simplifying the process. Although a person can now join the Library without identification with their ticket will be posted out to their address, Gateshead Libraries also offers a temporary membership to visitors to the area for use of Internet and ICT services.

Key Objective 4: Provide suitable training to improve employees' skills and confidence to understand the needs of asylum seekers and refugees and respond to them appropriately and effectively

In Gateshead Equality & Diversity Training for employees is a high priority and 90% of the staff in libraries has attended this training.
Training has remained a priority of the project and all consortium members have been keen to provide at the very least awareness training for frontline staff.
In Gateshead through WTYL we have developed a good working relationship with Gateshead Council's Refugee and Asylum Seeker Support Team. We approached Shela Close the Head of Service to design some awareness training for frontline Library employees. The service offers a general awareness course, which Shela agreed to adapt to cover particular areas of concern to library employees. The course was held at the Central Library and allowed participants to develop a greater understanding of Asylum/Refugee issues and its impact on the people living in Gateshead. The course included definitions of terms, the facts behind the headlines and an appreciation of local and global issues.
The feedback from participants was extremely positive and it is hoped to role out training to all library employees with an element of the training being included in the induction of new employees.

In addition, as discussed in objective 1 the consortium worked together with John Vincent to develop a training programme incorporating Refugee and Asylum seeker awareness but centred on social inclusion. Sunderland, South Tyneside and Gateshead hosted the course with awareness training being provided by NERS at Sunderland and South Tyneside and by Gateshead Council's Refugee and Asylum Seeker support team. The course was well received by the majority of participants and led to some important work being carried out as a follow-up. In Gateshead delegates compiled an action plan, which is helping to insure WTYL is incorporated into service delivery as a matter of course.
The training programme and evaluation are attached as Appendix 1 & 2.

Three senior library assistants from the service attended a NTG residential training course in 2007 resulting in an Action Plan to set up an information/ welcome pack for refugees and asylum seekers using the service. This pack has recently been produced in draft form and once finalised will be sent to each service point as a toolkit for frontline staff, please see Appendix 3.

Key Objective 5: Provide consultation and involvement opportunities for refugees and asylum seekers within the service

The consortium commissioned the University of Northumbria to undertake some research into the information needs of RAS communities. In Gateshead the researchers

attended the support group that meets in St Josephs Church in Central Gateshead. The final report was interesting and provided more evidence of the potential public libraries have in playing a significant role in assisting refugees and asylum seekers to be part of their local community. (Appendix 4)

Gateshead Libraries view community engagement and consultation as an essential driver for the service. The Central Library recently was successful in achieving Big Lottery funding to improve and develop the central library as a community library. Consultation with users and the local community was a major part of the application and will continue to influence the decision making process regarding many aspects of service provision.
As part of the ongoing consultation on the design of the Central Library community groups have been invited to take part in workshops including;
- Gateshead Visible Ethnic Minority Support Group
- Gateshead Muslim Society
- Gateshead African Community
- Congolese Solidarity in Gateshead

It is hoped that setting up this process of communication will also encourage RAS groups to make use of the new improved library building and develop a sense of ownership in the service.

Libraries and the Council's Strategic Partnership work closely with the Gateshead Community Network and the WTYL project officer attended a Community engagement seminar in March. The seminar worked on developing common definitions of what stakeholders in Gateshead mean by: - community involvement, engagement, consultation, participation and development. The objectives of the day were to develop a shared understanding of these terms and to share the knowledge of community consultation and engagement mechanisms.
The seminar was particularly useful in applying the methods in which we aim to engage with harder to reach groups such as RAS communities. Continuing involvement with the Gateshead Community Network can only strengthen and enhance libraries relationship with its community.

Key Objective 6: Undertake targeted projects to engage refugees and asylum seekers with the service and to inform the wider community of asylum seeker issues.

As outlined, a substantial amount of work has been undertaken to achieve the key objectives of the Welcome to Your Library project in terms of raising the profile of the library service, setting up channels of communication with RAS communities and training for front line staff.
As a result, specific targeted projects are now being established and will be sought out as part of ongoing service delivery. The following are a few specific examples:

Citizenship
A considerable amount of work has been carried out into Gateshead Libraries future role in the supporting of candidates wishing to take the 'Life in the UK' test. A £600 grant was obtained from MLA North East which enabled the purchase of test handbooks and support materials for citizenship candidates.

'Life in Britain' software from 220 soft has now been purchased and installed into Central, Sunderland Road and Dunston Libraries; the ICT Learning Officer has designed a staff training materials and a programme of staff training sessions at these libraries for January 2008.

The software was purchased after a successful pilot during 2007's Refugee Week events. The software will be marketed throughout the borough with particular attention to the newly established ESOL classes run by Adult Education.

(Image)

Six Book Challenge

We are working with the Reader Development Librarian on the BBC's Six Book Challenge in which we will be promoting our Quick Read collections with several adult learning groups including the ESOL classes. This initiative came from attending the BBC Vital Link and Raw training day at Durham University.

Educational Support Group @ Bensham Community Centre

The Central Library now provides resources and support to a voluntary group meeting weekly at Bensham Grove Community Centre. Established by Shamim Arshad, Community Health Worker, the group provides additional learning support to the children of Refugees and Asylum seekers. Libraries have set up several reading groups within the larger group to extend the children's language skills and to foster a love of reading. The three groups range from a story time session with the under 6s to a book discussion group and individual reading support with the older members.

Conclusions

The work undertaken under the 'Welcome to your Library' banner has been a worthwhile and sustainable project for Gateshead Library service. Frontline staff has been engaged through an effective training programme and changes have been made to service provision, working practice and the management of stock and resources.

An effective network of partnerships has developed which will facilitate the ongoing ethos of the project and ensure effective library service involvement in events and initiatives after the project's official end.

The Senior Management Team has strongly supported the project. In addition to this effective linking of the project plan to local and national strategies has ensured the project has contributed to local and national strategic objectives, such as community engagement and social inclusion.

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Appendix 1

WELCOME TO YOUR LIBRARY –Connecting public libraries with refugees and asylum seekers

Training course for frontline staff to be held on the 20th September 2007 in the Council Chamber of the Old Town Hall Gateshead from 9am-4pm.

Programme

The aims of this one-day course are to:
- Look at and understand the different definitions (inclusion, exclusion, community engagement, etc)
- See where public libraries fit into the 'bigger picture'
- Examine and decide how we can dismantle barriers to take-up of service
- Understand the needs of refugees and asylum-seekers (especially in the NE)
- Understand how we may change our working methods to meet these needs.

9am	Coffee/tea
9.30am	Welcome and introductions by Principle Library Manager Stephen Walters.
9.35am	John Vincent from "The Network, Tackling Social Exclusion in Libraries ,Museums, Archives and Galleries."

What is social exclusion?

Where do libraries fit into the 'bigger picture'?

10.45am	Coffee/tea
11am	**What are the barriers to take-up of our services?**

Whole-group work to identify barriers, followed by small group work to identify what we are doing well, and what we need to improve.

12.15pm	**Headline news – why we need to transform our services**
12.30pm	Lunch
1.15pm	Shela Close ; Team Leader Gateshead Council Asylum & Refugee Team **Refugee and Asylum Seeker Awareness session.**
3.30pm	**What can we all do to take this work forward? Group and individual action plans**
3.55pm	Conclusions
4.00pm	Close of course

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Appendix 2

Gateshead Council
www.gateshead.gov.uk

WELCOME TO YOUR LIBRARY –Connecting public libraries with refugees and asylum seekers

Asylum Seeker Awareness; Training Impact Assessment

This is a summary of the evaluation of the training course held at Gateshead Old Town Hall on Thursday 20th September.
Nineteen delegates attended in total and each of the five Tyne and Wear Consortium members were represented.

The aims of the course were

- Look at and understand the different definitions (inclusion, exclusion, community engagement, etc)
- See where public libraries fit into the 'bigger picture'
- Examine and decide how we can dismantle barriers to take-up of service
- Understand the needs of refugees and asylum-seekers (especially in the NE)
- Understand how we may change our working methods to meet these needs.

The delegates were asked how they would rate their knowledge of the reasons people seek asylum and the problems they face:

Very good = 15%   Good = 36%   Fair = 44%   Poor = 5%

Did they develop their understanding of refugees and asylum seekers as a result of the training?

100% replied: Yes

Did they think the training would help them work more effectively with this group in the library?

100% replied: Yes

Comments:

The 'Welcome' video was particularly informative as it focussed on real people.

The training was very helpful and I now have a better understanding of the wider picture.

Definitions of terms was particularly useful.

Views from other people on course was very interesting.

Would be good to speak to refugees and asylum seekers in person.

Information from Shela Close of the various stages of asylum / refugee status.

Social exclusion can happen to anyone!

Would like further training on communicating across language barriers.

I feel that my authority is tackling this really well with many ongoing projects & developments.

It was useful to see a wider picture of how libraries can help.

Language Line training would be good

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Appendix 3
(Draft Copy)

Did you know?

'Welcome to Gateshead Libraries' and 'Computer's in Gateshead Libraries' information sheets are available in 8 different languages

The information sheets are available in Czech, Farsi, Portuguese, Russian, Polish, Latvian, French and Arabic. You can access these by double clicking "My Computer" on your desktop. Then select Infoteam on N drive/Iknow & Local Common files/Welcome & Computer translations

Why not save these files to your branch folder and use them the next time someone comes into your branch who is struggling with English?

There is a voluntary translation service which we as library staff could potentially have access to

An employee Language audit is routinely done by Legal & Corporate services and is offered on a voluntary basis only. In the event of someone needing a translator, you may call Dawn Parker on ext 2170 and request a volunteer, but it cannot be guaranteed that someone will be available to accommodate your request.

Current Languages spoken by employees are French, German, Spanish, Italian, British Sign Language, Urdu, Hindi, Greek, Afrikaans, Punjabi. The levels and standard of speaking, reading and writing varies across the board.

The Sound Gallery has a number of CDs and cassettes to help users to learn English

As of Autumn 07, the Sound Gallery stocks the following language courses:

Name of course	Medium	Barcode
English for Arabic speakers	**CD**	**C742480560**
English for Brazilian Portuguese Speakers	**CD**	**C742480760**
English as a Foreign Language	**CD**	**C742371360**
English for French Speakers	**CD**	**C742480660**
English (Linguaphone)	**Cassette**	**C741621060**
English for Russian Speakers	**CD**	**c742480860**
English for Spanish Speakers	**CD**	**C742480960**

You can find these English courses quickly on Talis by typing "English" in as a keyword and "ENG" in the classification field.

We have adult fiction and children fiction stock in foreign languages

There are three adult fiction collections held in Iknow at Central Library. These are in French, Albanian and Arabic. There is also a small collection of Hungarian and Czech at Central. Polish adult fiction can mainly be found at Central and Dunston Libraries, whilst the Polish junior fiction can be mainly found at Birtley and at Schools. Other foreign language collections can be ordered through Materials at Central Library, and are issued to Gateshead Libraries for four months. There is also a small collection of Children's fiction in Kurdish, Farsi, Albanian, Bengali, Czech Spanish, Chinese and Urdu. These are located in Central Lending Stack.

Youth Services also have a small collection of dual language children's books (books in English and a foreign language). These include books in Arabic, Gujarati, Turkish, Portuguese, Albanian, Serbo-Croatian, Punjabi, Spanish, Urdu, Hindi, French, Kurdish, Bengali, Vietnamese, Somali and Chinese. Please contact Youth Services for the most up to date languages and titles.

We have stock to help customers develop their basic English

There is a collection of quick reads. These are very short books written by popular authors in both fiction and non-fiction. They are aimed at adults who are either emergent readers or those who have English as a second language and could be daunted by a full sized novel.

We also have audio packs, which include a book and both a CD and cassette so the reader can follow the story by both listening and reading.

Refugees and asylum seekers are entitled to a free ILL book if it's from one of the Foreign Language Collections held by the North East Consortium of Library Authorities

Gateshead, Newcastle, North Tyneside, South Tyneside and Sunderland City
Council Libraries have all agreed to share resources from their Foreign
Language Collections via the Inter Library Loans Scheme, free of charge.
These resources are delivered by the regional library van and can be ordered
as usual through our own, Gateshead ILL section. Please find included in this
pack a 'Foreign Language Collection Index' indicating where Foreign
Language Collections can be found among the Consortium members. If you
have any questions, please contact Lynne McKinlay or Gateshead's ILL team.

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Appendix 4

RESEARCH INTO REFUGEES & ASYLUM SEEKERS (RAS) LIBRARY/INFORMATION NEEDS

A report prepared by Shona McTavish and Dr Alison Pickard on behalf of Newcastle, Gateshead, Sunderland, South Tyneside and North Tyneside Public Library Authorities

March 29th 2007

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RESEARCH INTO REFUGEES & ASYLUM SEEKERS (RAS) LIBRARY/INFORMATION NEEDS

1.   Introduction

The Welcome to Your Library (WTYL) Tyne & Wear (T&W) consortium is comprised of the library authorities in Newcastle, Gateshead, North Tyneside, South Tyneside and Sunderland. The consortium has identified the need to establish evidence based information around RAS' access to libraries and their information needs, and feels strongly that the information should come directly from RAS themselves (i.e. not to make assumptions). As all the library authorities in the T&W consortium had time/capacity constraints, they approached colleagues from the School of Computing, Engineering & Information Sciences at Northumbria University. This research was carried out under the PEARL (Partnership in Education, Achievement, Research, and Learning) consortium agreement which facilitates joint endeavours between the relevant PLAs and Northumbria University. Colleagues from the Information and Communication Management subject group within the School agreed to undertake some research with RAS on behalf of the consortium. It is hoped that this research will benefit Library Authorities by providing information they can use to consider their services in relation to RAS. Also, because an independent organisation is conducting the research, it will be objective and more credible than if it had been carried out in-house. This research study focuses on T&W and will concentrate on responses from RAS.

2.   Aims

- to establish evidence based information around RAS' access to libraries and their information needs
- to find out what RAS see as being the barriers to using the library
- to establish a methodology for engaging with and involving RAS in the development of services and in order to build trust and good relationships

3.   Methodology

The research took an interpretivist approach to investigating the library/information needs of refugees and asylum seekers in the North East of England. The purpose of the research was to gain insight into the attitudes and opinions of this group to library services within the region. In order to avoid making assumptions about possible needs of the group it was decided to allow the data to emerge naturally rather than design an a priori framework that could potentially restrict the discovery. The interpretivist paradigm demands the harvesting of rich, detailed, descriptive qualitative data that allows for insight and discovery. The emergent design of interpretivist research does not allow for a detailed plan before the research begins 'the research design must therefore be 'played by ear'; it must unfold, cascade, roll, emerge' [Lincoln and Guba, 1985 p.203]. However, it is possible to develop a design which allows for the iterative nature of the study. In this investigation an initial plan was constructed which allowed the researchers access to appropriate groups in appropriate locations and provided an open structure to facilitate open sharing of the research participants' personal views on the central issues of this research.

Taking into consideration the nature of the research participants it was decided to arrange focus groups in locations within each Public Library Authority (PLA), it was important that participants felt comfortable and familiar with these locations to encourage open discourse. Powell [et. al.]

define a focus group as, 'a group of individuals selected and assembled by researchers to discuss and comment on, from personal experience, the topic that is the subject of the research' [1996, p. 499]. The focus group technique has been used in social research since the late 1930's [Kreuger,1988], but possibly the most obvious use of the technique has been in market research where it is applied to investigate consumer preferences and habits. Focus groups were chosen as the most appropriate data collection technique for a number of reasons, focus groups allow 'a variety of perspectives and explanations [to] be obtained from a single data-gathering session' [Gorman & Clayton, 1997, p.142]. This meant that optimum levels of data collection could be anticipated within the very limited time frame for the actual fieldwork. Because of the circumstances of this research community it was also thought that they would be more willing to share their views if they were in a familiar space and surrounded by familiar faces. It was important to recognise the cultural factors which could so easily have influenced the data collection in this investigation. 'The purpose of focus groups is to enable a range of perceptions, feelings and attitudes from participants across a range of issues to be explored. It is possible to conduct relatively in-depth discussions with a small group of participants who may be only a small proportion of the target population or the entire target population. They have the potential to allow for a wide range of views, beliefs and perceptions to be generated in a single data collection exercise.' [Pickard, 2007 p.220] In this research it was necessary to keep the data collection as open as possible to allow the participants the freedom to voice whatever issues were important to them without being restricted by preconceptions of the researchers.

In this investigation focus groups were arranged in Sunderland, Gateshead, Newcastle and South Shields. For all but one of these, researchers attended established meetings where the RAS' community felt comfortable and were surrounded by familiar people. In one location it was necessary to use a designated space in the central library but the members of the focus group were all familiar with the space and the meeting was also attended by an objective observer known to the group. Due to the number of different native languages of participants in one of the groups it proved much more useful to sit with a range of very small groups within a large communal room, and to engage in group conversations with a maximum of 4 participants at a time. Where language was a real barrier an interpreter was used for clarity. In 3 of the 4 locations all focus group participants were female, in the 4th location all participants were male and, as not all were willing to take part, it was decided to use individual interviews.

4. Key Findings

The findings of this research report are structured around five key themes and where appropriate recommendations have been made within the discussion of these themes. It should also be noted that all RAS interviewed as part of this research used a library service but this should not be taken as meaning that this is 'usual'. It is likely that on being approached as regards their willingness to participate in focus groups or individual interviews that they opted to do so purely because they were users and felt that they would have something to say, knowing something about libraries. We must ask ourselves if one does not know about, or use libraries, is one likely to volunteer to participate in research about libraries?. This research cannot answer that question but does provide some points for consideration by PLAs in reaching RAS.

4.1 Finding out about Libraries

4.1.1. Libraries are potentially used more where they are situated around sought after amenities. For example, people who live in one area did not necessarily use the library in that area preferring

to use those close to where they did their shopping. Some RAS clearly preferred their branch library to use of a central library. However, the branch libraries were often spotted as a result of, for example, visits to doctors or when shopping, suggesting their closeness to amenities. For some people branch libraries were perceived as more accessible, where central libraries were viewed as 'big' and 'difficult to go into'. For others, however, use was made of a central library as they were not aware that there were such things as branch libraries.

4.1.2. RAS in discussing how they became aware of the library service highlighted the following scenarios:

- Support Workers (some RAS were also shown where the library was by support workers)
- By chance, where on speaking to his landlady about paying for access to the Internet, being told 'why pay? Go to the library'.
- It was found that children were often the ones who introduced adults to public library services. Children had been made aware of public library services though school.
- Some RAS were studying and found out about libraries from their place of study
- Found it by themselves. (Walking along – oh! there is a library)
- Asked neighbours
- Nobody told me, I have been in (town) for 18 months and did not know about libraries
- Community group drop-in sessions (held in local churches and largely staffed by volunteers)
- Told to ask in library for help about something
- Refugee Centre
- ESOL

It is clear from the above scenarios that schools, refugee centres, ESOL, community support workers and drop-in sessions are key links for this particular group and there is the potential for PLAs to work more closely with these groups to promote their services. Furthermore, it was recognised by the researchers during the data collection process that local churches and their volunteers play a key role in supporting RAS and as such could provide a valuable link to RAS and their potential needs.

4.2 Need for increased participation by Libraries?

4.2.1. Asylum seeker groups would welcome an increased participation and representation from libraries at their drop-in sessions (highlighted by volunteers/workers and also evidenced in authorities where this did happen).

4.2.2. The majority of people we spoke to were women, many who had children, and as a result valued a library service. However, because they were extremely busy they were often only able to visit the library occasionally or at the weekend. We would suggest therefore that there is the scope for libraries to become more active in the drop-in sessions and to consider taking certain library services out to the RAS. In addition, through library staff being present at these sessions, they will be increasing awareness of the types of services on offer in the library, and, at the same time, becoming familiar faces to the RAS and thereby potentially encouraging future visits to local libraries. Library staff, once known to the RAS, could also arrange to take groups to the library (volunteers/workers thought this would prove useful to RAS who attend their drop-in sessions).

4.3 Impression of Libraries

4.3.1. Libraries, where used, are considered welcoming, comfortable and nice places to be, with friendly staff. However, the first visit for some RAS to a library can be daunting. Factors mentioned included the look of the building, not knowing what it would be like inside, what to expect, and a lack of confidence in English. For some RAS, accessing a library was new to them, not having the same facilities in their previous country. For one RAS, on entering the library and being met by a fellow language speaker, expressed huge relief at this encounter. However, once in the library many RAS mentioned that they felt comfortable asking questions and seeking help.

As language is an initial barrier to RAS there is the potential for PLAs, once regular and consistent contact has been made with refugees, that the refugees themselves are encouraged to act as volunteers in introducing RAS to the library and its many services.

4.3.2. One or two people mentioned that they had not opted to use the library earlier because they thought that they would have to pay. Linked to 4.3.3 below, this suggests that information surrounding access to the library being free needs to be emphasised.

4.3.3. Libraries offer a lifeline in enabling communication with friends and family through the use of their Internet facilities. Some of the RAS also suggested that it would have been useful if they had known about the library and this service on entering the country and on being re-located. Although some people mentioned that library information was provided in the information pack that they were given on entering the country, we would suggest that this perhaps did not always stand out or perhaps the information that is provided is not around the types of services that would immediately attract them to use the library, e.g., does the information provided highlight free access to the Internet or even free access to the library? Of course there will also be the problem of limited English on arrival for some people and hence why the information provided would perhaps not initially stand out. Many RAS expressed a preference to have someone explain any information to them. Taking this point into consideration, there is the potential for PLAs to look to providing information on the library and its services in visual formats in addition to printed materials.

4.4 Services highlighted as being used

4.4.1 The main service highlighted as being used was the Internet for communication with family and friends and to keep up-to-date with happenings within their original country. Libraries were also seen by some as social places, a place where they can meet up with friends or just to be around people. Additional services highlighted were:

- Borrowing Books (for children mainly but also some adults mentioned borrowing books for themselves)
- Borrowing books to help with English Language
- Photocopying
- Use of computers for homework and use of computers while children play
- CDs

4.4.2 Reasons given for not using certain services included:

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- Use of Internet but not books as there were few books available in their native language. However, many mentioned that as their English improves then they will borrow books in English

4.4.3 The majority of RAS interviewed did not highlight any items or services that they would like to see provided by the library service, being very happy with what they have access to. But one needs to bear in mind that for many RAS this is the first time that they have had access to a library and as such are they not likely to be impressed with what is provided? The few examples that arose out of the conversations held included:

- Scanner
- Dictionaries covering native language
- More computers
- Being shown how to use the Internet (not only access to written help as preference was to be shown)
- Wider choice of materials in native language
- Activities for 5-8 year olds (perceived activities held in libraries as being for younger children)

4.5 When is the right time to find out about Library Services?

Clearly from what has been discussed above, many felt that they would like to have known about the library from day one, particularly in relation to Internet access. A few people also highlighted its value as a place to go, somewhere to meet people and importantly, somewhere to see people! Only a few people suggested that knowing about the library services on arrival was too soon.

What also emerged from the conversations held was that for some people it was not until they had a specific need, e.g., transport details, that they then identified that the library held this type of information. Linked to the Internet point discussed above, perhaps in promoting its services to RAS libraries need to place more emphasis on the day-to-day types of information, focussing on specific types of information, in addition to providing an overview of the services offered.

5. Key issues for consideration by PLAs.

- Local churches and their volunteers, Schools, Refugee Centres, ESOL, Community Support Workers, and drop-in sessions were identified as key links for this particular group of RAS.
- RAS groups would welcome an increased participation and representation from libraries at their drop-in sessions.
- Libraries are potentially used more where they are situated around day-to-day amenities such as shops and health centres.
- Branch libraries are often perceived as more accessible than central or larger libraries, however, not everyone was aware of the existence of branch libraries.
- Majority of RAS interviewed were women with children who felt that they were too busy to visit the library on a regular basis.
- Libraries, where used, are considered welcoming, comfortable and nice places to be, with friendly staff.
- First visit to a library can be daunting for RAS.

- Many RAS have no experience of libraries prior to entry into this country.
- RAS felt comfortable asking questions and seeking help from staff in libraries.
- Not all RAS are aware that they can access a library free of charge.
- Libraries can offer a lifeline in enabling communication with friends and family through the use of their Internet facilities, but RAS need to be aware of these services and, importantly, any charges for these services.
- Information on libraries provided to RAS on arrival needs to be highlighted and explained through a range of mediums.
- The RAS who used libraries were very pleased with what the libraries had to offer. However, Library Authorities need to bear in mind that the RAS had no expectations, many having no prior experience of libraries and therefore nothing to measure current services against.
- Main services used by RAS include, use of PCs, books, CDs, photocopying
- Services requested by RAS include access to; scanner, more PCs, language dictionaries, native language materials, and activities for 4-8 year olds.

6. Lessons Learned

This was a small scale research project and this section considers points that could prove useful to the authorities forming part of this research who wish to expand upon this research, and to other authorities looking to carry out their own research into the needs of RAS.

- As a small scale research study the findings identified above cannot be generalised across library authorities but serve as an indicator as to potential areas for consideration in terms of library service provision to RAS.
- Informed participation. We cannot emphasise enough the need for any groups being visited for the purposes of data collection to be aware, in advance, of the nature of the research, how it is to be carried out, for what purpose and by whom. Leaders, volunteers, and RAS within the drop-in sessions need to be made aware. Where they are not fully aware then much of the time allotted to gathering data from RAS can be lost.
- Through exploring the idea of the research with various potential sites prior to the research being carried out, there is also the possibility of identifying additional or more appropriate sites with a larger user group of RAS and thereby affording the potential to gather more in-depth data.
- If you have any language speakers of the RAS' native tongues within your authority it could prove useful to have them accompany the researchers to act as translators. There might also be volunteer language speakers supporting, for example, drop-in sessions. It is worthwhile identifying these people in advance and seeking their assistance.

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