



LIVERPOOL LIBRARIES AND INFORMATION SERVICES

WELCOME TO YOUR LIBRARY

Connecting public libraries and refugee communities

Final Report December 2007

1. Introduction

Welcome To Your Library-Context

Welcome to Your Library is a national project that connects refugees and asylum seekers to their local libraries. The project is modelled on the principle of local community and customer participation to ensure services are provided and developed appropriately. This approach means that the Welcome to Your Library model of engagement could potentially be used to develop services for any socially excluded group or community.

Liverpool Libraries Vision Statement for Welcome to Your Library

We will connect Liverpool's public libraries and refugee and asylum seeker communities together to nurture learning, well-being and a sense of belonging for all.

This will be achieved by:

- Ensuring participation of refugee communities throughout the work.
- Developing partnerships to raise awareness and increase public library use.
- Providing confident well informed and trained library staff.
- Sharing good practice based on evidence.
- Providing advocacy for public library work with refugees and asylum seekers.

Partners

- Liverpool City Council has an established Equality Policy and has set up an Asylum Seeker Support and Resettlement Team to help asylum seekers within the city. Several Liverpool City Council service areas also have dedicated units aimed at supporting asylum seekers, refugees and their families. e.g. Adult education/advice and teaching support for children of school age

- In addition to the support offered by Liverpool City Council there are also a significant number of other organizations within Liverpool working with refugees and asylum seekers. This includes the Health Authority, Merseyside Police Community Relations, the Fire Service, National Museums Liverpool, Liverpool John Moores University and many charitable and voluntary organizations providing dedicated local advice and support.
- Many local associations and groups have been set up to support people from different countries often being run by former asylum seekers and refugees.

Local policy drivers relevant to Welcome to Your Library

Liverpool City Council's WTYL Related Strategic Documents

Liverpool has developed a number of key policy documents which relate to Welcome To Your Library. These include the Aims and Vision for the City, an Equal Opportunities Statement and a commitment to the Race Equality Standards/Framework and progressing through the RES levels over time.

www.liverpool.gov.uk (note targets updated June 2006)

Liverpool Children's and Young People's Plan

Targets the improvement of educational standards for local children including black and minority pupils in Liverpool schools.

www.liverpool.gov.uk

Liverpool Libraries and Information Services Annual Service Plan

A strategy document that sets out aims targets that the library service must aim to meet during the coming year.

www.liverpool.gov.uk

Liverpool Libraries and Information Services – Open for Learning

An inclusive learning strategy for Liverpool Libraries set within national policy context. Identifies the need to reach socially excluded communities

www.liverpool.gov.uk/libraries

Local Area Agreements for Liverpool Neighbourhoods

Liverpool is currently reviewing its provision of services at a Neighborhood level in tandem with the Government's move to devolve decision making more closely to local communities. Liverpool is likely to be included in the third round for developing its overall Local Area Agreement Strategic Plan.

www.liverpool.gov.uk

2. Key activities Autumn /Winter 2007/08.

Marketing

After much negotiation with the Marketing Department we finally got the translations for the welcome leaflets, computer code of conduct and the joining cards. These were made available in print and in electronic format. The council web team organised two new web pages for me, one entitled Welcome to Your Library and the other a Diversity Events page. Both of these pages drop down from the Libraries Diversity page at http://www.liverpool.gov.uk/Leisure_and_culture/Libraries/Diversity/index.asp

As a content editor I was able to put the information on the Library website for both staff and library members to use. These leaflets have been increasing useful for me to use during outreach and at events and the local communities are always pleased to see information in their own languages.

Outreach activities

Our partnerships continue to flourish. Andy and I have conducted library welcome sessions and started the conversation club. The amount of people coming to the library with the Smithdown Bilingual group has increased with the introduction of a Men's group. It was noticeable how the men were much more confident speakers and that their verbal English skills were better than those of the Women's Group. This highlights the need to target services to women in the RAS communities who can often be hard to reach. Two days we joined 50 people and their families from these two groups. I did a similar session for the asylum seeker study group at Kensington Lifebank, at Kensington Library. The tutor was astonished to find out that we offered these services and thought there might be a fee attached our session. This proves that there is still much to be done to get the message out regarding all that the public library can offer RAS communities. Other organisations that I have worked with this Autumn/Winter include Refugee Action who held an employment day at Toxteth Library-this had very good feedback though members of the conversation club. Yambi Africa, a Nigerian organisation also held an event in Toxteth Library combining visual arts, dance and drama to commemorate the anniversary of the abolition of the slave trade.

Conversation Club

We had our first session of the club at the end of October. Subjects we have addressed in the club include Health, Food, Christmas, Shopping and two popular sessions on Scouse words and slang. The club has been popular. We average between 12-15 people per week occasionally more. Nationalities attending have been varied including Russian, Bulgarians, Italian, Spanish, Nepalese, Burundi, Nigerian and a large contingent of Chinese people,. The Chinese part of the group have been the most consistent along with the Eastern Europeans, turning up on a regular basis with other nationalities dipping in and out as it suited them. Many of the people who have attended have had interesting occupations from working with horses to graphic designers to qualified doctors. We quickly realised that one of the problems was the varied levels of English that people had. It was more developed in some whilst others could only say one or two words. We solved this by splitting the group into two, Andy leading on the more basic level and I on the more developed. We began with two formal volunteers including Daniel, a Chinese

ESOL teacher who was fairly new to the country and Joan an extremely active retiree from local church. Both were instrumental in getting the group started. As the group developed it became apparent that there were people from within who were acting as informal volunteers, translating where necessary and assisting with pushing the conversation forward. Feedback from the people attending was very positive although we lost one or two people at the beginning because the conversation was too advanced. Individuals in the group became friends with each other outside of the group, many of these friendships were cross nationality. Natalya, a Russian, was a good example of this. She attended the group in the first week of her arrival and told me she loved the group because she literally had no one to talk to and was lonely. She continued to communicate outside of the group and referred to many in the group as her "Chinese Friends". The group is still going strong but will need continual promotion to top up the numbers as people leave and come and go from the city. The group has proved to be a big commitment in the working week because although it is conversation, there is still a large amount of preparation work to ensure that there is plenty to talk about and to keep the conversation flowing. The group particularly enjoy games and simple tasks and it is time consuming to find suitable material. However it is very rewarding to see people from different cultures communicating with each other and that the group has highlighted is the similarities between these not the differences. On a more basic level I myself have learned much about the different cultures that have attended the groups. In the next phase we would like to develop the group further by organising guest speakers to talk about different subjects and involve more volunteers possibly to interact with the group on a more individual basis.

Stock

Our stock orders arrived in batches and arrivals were not complete until the autumn. We now have Somali, French, Arabic, Farsi and a small amount of Spanish. I obtained guidance in appropriate languages from our marketing department and after consultation with the children's team we are now ready to complete the stock work at Edge Hill library where the majority of the multi cultural stock will be located. However requests for community language stock are now flying in from all over the community libraries, some from economic migrants but many from Somali, Arabic and increasingly Urdu speakers.

Through my work with various groups I have been asked for audio visual materials, language learning packs and magazines. I will address these issues through my stock plan for 2008/9

Positive Action Trainee

The service obtained funding from Time to Read NW for a positive action placement trainee. The training is a 9 month period and is designed to give the trainee experience of working in a public library and to encourage reader development work with adults in the community who spoke either French, Kurdish or Farsi. Matab was appointed in January and it was interesting that she had learned of the vacancy through Refugee Action to whom I had sent the advert, where she was working a volunteer. She had heard of me before I had met her which I took this to be a sign that awareness of the library services had increased amongst and through our partner organisations. Matab is an Iranian Farsi

speaker and although she is being supervised by the Books and Reading Team, I am also working with her. I have relocated the Farsi Books to Kensington where she is based and we are working on a brief staff training session regarding awareness of the Iranian culture. Matab has many contacts in the community and we are hoping to work with these contacts to introduce them to the services of Liverpool Libraries.

Toxteth Library

We received the news in the autumn that we had been successful in our application for a Big Lottery grant for Toxteth Library, receiving 1.3 million pounds to develop the library as a centre of excellence for community engagement. John Keane had been heavily involved in writing the bid and was able to use the knowledge we had accumulated and the community mapping undertaken as part of WTYL not only to inform parts of the bid but also to highlight our links with partners in the local community, many of them RAS organisations. The development of the library will help us to engage further with the RAS communities across the next 3 years. Extra staff will be appointed as a part of the bid continue the process to raise the profile of the service, and to increase the membership of the library by people from all cultural backgrounds.

3. Overall progress in relation to aims and Liverpool's WTYL project plan. Successes and barriers

Welcome to Your Library is a national project that connects refugees and asylum seekers to their local libraries. The project is modeled on the principle of local community and customer participation to ensure services are provided and developed appropriately. The key aim for Liverpool libraries and Information Services is to bring Liverpool's public libraries and refugee and asylum seeker communities together to nurture learning, well-being and a sense of belonging for all. The following sets out reflections on our progress overall across the timeframe of the project against the objectives we set in our project plan.

Objective 1: Identify current RAS communities in Liverpool, their levels of Library use and the barriers to using a library that need eliminating.

We considered this the most difficult part of the WTYL project because this broad aim had a complexity that we were unaware of before the project started.

- **Need to increase awareness of library strategic managers of issues affecting the RAS community.**

Our main problem at the beginning of this project was our lack of understanding of the asylum process, the current situation regarding immigration to Liverpool, or what was available in the community that addressed the needs of the RAS communities. Our knowledge and understanding has been informed by the use of local and national

statistics, partnerships work and actively engaging with local populations who use our services or attend events or classes within the Library Service. The main thing we have learned the situation is constantly changing. National government priorities and politics mean that the range of services available at a local level is not stable or reliable. An example of this is the recent changes to ESOL provision which means that organisations needed to be more specialist and creative in attending to the needs of RAS populations.

- **Difficulty locating information due to a lack of coordination of resources and information for RAS communities in Liverpool**

There is little central coordination of information or knowledge of RAS communities. Knowledge of the situation for RAS communities is normally easier to access from non government organizations because that is their specific remit and they work with people at a grass roots level. As a result their knowledge tends to be more in depth but less neutral. Such organisations are bound by financial considerations rather than strategic priorities. This is not to say that their strategic priorities are not key, but that limited funding dictates that the physical wellbeing of their users will always take priority. This meant in effect, that we had to visit as many RAS community organisations as possible to gain a full picture as to the current situation. This has been ongoing throughout the project and into autumn 2007 as new organisations establish themselves, we need to keep the profile of the library service high. Similarly, at first we struggled to locate relevant information within Liverpool City Council because it is not located centrally within one service area and it was harder to collate because of the nature of the large organisation-it tended to be spread out across the service and in the hands of individuals in smaller service areas. Nor were the RAS community necessarily counted as a specific group. Information was mapped about designated ethnic minority groups, and these designations are used across the Council. For example, the Ethnic Minority and Travellers Achievement Service (EMTAS) specifically engage with young people and adults in the RAS communities but under the more general heading of Ethnic Minorities rather than RAS. However when contacted by us EMTAS produced much in the way of valuable statistics that enabled us to initially map the local situation. We have successfully identified and contacted other individuals in various service areas, to access information that we didn't know how to find pre WTYL. This mapping enabled us to identify what was needed, how we could realistically help and assess how we could build new services into library strategy.

- **Difficulty of forming RAS strategy to feed into Local Government framework**

Local Government is strategically focused. Often it is difficult to transfer strategy into practical work, and although the stratagem may be based upon corporate visions it can be difficult to meet theoretical targets when dealing with individual people and soft impacts. It is often difficult to measure impacts relating to quality of life, mental health and physical well being. By ensuring that WTYL was built into the Library

Service Plan we overcame some of the problems regarding monitoring the success of WTYL. It seemed logical to us to use City Council strategic emphasis to embed new library services or library practices. Building the services that we intended to deliver to RAS communities into our Service Equality Action Plan (SEAP) meant that we would be accountable if we did not meet our service targets. This also enabled us to allocate time to the outreach work that we needed to do to make WTYL a success in Liverpool. It also enabled us to prioritise our work as we only committed to targets that we expected to be measurable and achievable. For, example the completion of the WTYL training film appears as an action in the SEAP. This is available for the general public to read on the liverpool.gov website, so providing the dual function of prioritising the completion and success of the action and also encouraging greater awareness of the range of work that public library services are engaging in.

- **Cultural differences within the RAS community**

Initially was easy to think of RAS communities as homogenous group, as often promoted through the media. As we got to know people from these communities on a personal level it became apparent that different cultures had different expectations of library services (often none), differing experiences of the asylum process, as well as separate languages and customs. Very often there are scions within countries with opposing cultural beliefs .We learned that an honesty of approach was needed when dealing with newcomer populations and that we had to acknowledge that we didn't know about their cultures in any depth and they in effect had to inform us rather than the other way round. Mine and Andy's attendance at a Community Cohesion Seminar led us to discover that a further barrier to integration of the new immigrants could often be an unwillingness established ethnic populations, whose families had been immigrants in the past, to accept the newcomers. As we mapped the communities further we discovered problems that were generic and that the Library Services seemed ideally placed to deal with, including the need for information about their home country, the need for information and learning materials in languages other than English, the need to acquire the English Language, and the loneliness and isolation felt by displaced people in an unfamiliar culture. We addressed these needs by offering new services and events that the whole community would attend or use but that would be attractive to the wide range of communities within the newcomer populations. For example, the users of the Conversation Club have come from not only from the refugee population, but also students and economic migrants.

- **Making RAS organizations understand the role public libraries could play in helping the RAS communities.**

We quickly realized on visiting different organizations that dealt with the RAS community that there was a total lack of awareness that the library service could provide anything other than books. Most managers didn't realize that the library employees had been engaged in outreach for a number of years, had successfully hosted cultural events or was able to provided reading material in other appropriate languages. On arrival at these organizations, it became clear that they had little idea

why we were visiting and displayed much surprise at what we could offer. This is a situation that we find is often repeated when engaged in outreach activities generally. This situation is a result of Public Library Services lack of attention, and funding in the past, for the marketing and publicity of achievements and successes. Once community organizations understood the range of services on offer then most were genuinely interested and they began to think of us with regard to referrals and invitations to engage in projects with them. Liverpool Libraries is becoming very adept as hosting cultural events and organizing publicity around such events. John Keane and Andy Johnson have developed much in the way of expertise regarding the organization of these events. John in particular has raised the profile of the library services through the activities of the Learning and Social Inclusion Team (LASI) by using his strategic overview, networking skills and organization of local publicity to ensure that community organizations are becoming increasingly aware of what we can offer. As a result the library service is now high on the wish list of community organizations as a key partner and we are being approached on a regular basis to be involved in partnership work across the city.

Objective 2: Raise awareness of Library resources available to RAS communities and develop participation in planning of services and activities to increase library use.

We feel we have successfully raised awareness of library resources 100% over the past year. This is shown by the fact that organizations now contact us and want to work with us as partners on specific projects. For instance, I have recently been asked to become a part of the Task group organized by the Liverpool community network to assist with a project “to enable the Education of different cultures/religion at a school level, and outreach work with local children and young people’s providers already working in the neighbourhood. “

The danger is that we will over commit ourselves and it has been difficult to refuse to become involved with projects when your input is valued. However our ability to recognize what is achievable has increased as our knowledge and confidence in working with RAS communities had developed, and as a result our judgment as to whether to commit to specific projects is now based upon the experience of past successes and mistakes.

The community is now continually involved in the planning of our services-request and “have your say” comments have increased. Feedback through welcome sessions and the conversation club directly impacts upon the focus of our priorities and our stock choices.

Library use by the overall BEM had increased substantially this year rising from 9.1% of all members to 9.7%. This indicates that our engagement work is successful and that the message is reaching minority groups who now see the library as a place for them. However, there is still much work to be done in promotional work as shown when managers and tutors from key organizations are still asking me if there is a charge for using the library or a fee for my services. I am hopeful that the development of Toxteth library will help with this ongoing process as there will be a

full community engagement process which will not only inform our service planning decisions, but also have the knock on affect of informing the community that the library can offer them more than just books.

Objective 3: Develop additional library resources for RAS communities

The biggest development in providing additional resources is the expansion of stock and library information in community languages. The issue of stock and resources was more complicated than we first thought and there have been difficulties sourcing the books from suppliers who can deliver in a timely way. However work in this area can be unpredictable with the communities asking you to provide something and then not using the resources once they arrive. Budget constraints have meant that I have had to focus work on key languages with a hope to expand the amount of languages available, particularly with the marketing materials, at a later date. Whether provision of new resources is a success will become apparent through our BEM monitoring processes. There is still much to explore regarding resources such as ESOL or citizenship software, classes held within the library context and more creative purchase of AV material. However much of this will need to be achieved through existing funding and strategic management and it may be some time further down the line before we can offer a full range of services to the RAS communities.

Objective 4: Develop staff skills, awareness and confidence in working with RAS communities.

With regular updates being sent out from myself and other members of the LASI team, staff are generally better informed of new developments that have happened within the service within the last 18 months, and of the new communities that are accessing the library. Staff reaction to the availability of Library information in community languages has been very positive as it gives them extra resources when dealing with the public across the counter.

I have noticed a growing confidence in recent months, particularly from library managers in dealing with different cultural communities that are accessing the libraries. This is due to a number of reasons

- Library managers have now gained enough experience in their roles to have the confidence to trust their own judgment
- There is more of a willingness on behalf of the library staff in general to discuss particular problems with me due to a better understanding of my role in the service. As a result they feel supported.
- As more people from ethnically diverse backgrounds use the library it becomes more the norm rather than a rarity. Specific problems arise repetitively and therefore there is a background of knowledge with which to resolve any problems.

- As more community engagement is undertaken staff can see the benefits to the library service as issue and figures increase.

Counter staff are now approaching me with a willingness to be involved in some of the work of engaging with communities. An example of this is Sheela Singh who works at Childwall Library and has identified a need for Hindi Books at this particular library. Her willingness to play a large role in the planning of resources provision demonstrates the enthusiasm that many of our frontline staff have for work with library users from multi cultural backgrounds. I am happy to help ideas such as this take shape but then to take a back seat and allow ownership by the library staff, as it leads to a more cohesive service, improves monitoring figures in general and frees my time to concentrate on community engagement and service planning.

There are still an outstanding issue of how to train or inform staff in depth about various cultural communities. However I hope to work with Andy and Matab on a workable plan for 2008

The Liverpool WTYL Film is progressing well and should be completed by late spring as timetabled. The Film has been storyboarded in four sections consisting of a history of immigration to Liverpool, the current situation, the welcome and services available in Liverpool library, and a final section on how to join the library. The film will be available in a variety of languages and will be sent to all of the libraries to raise awareness of which groups are likely to use the services and how to support them in accessing the facilities at the library. The involvement of key library managers in the film will further improve confidence and ownership of the services to the RAS communities in Liverpool. Our partnership with Sola Arts has been fruitful and we have gained many further contacts through working with them. It is a benefit to us to have an organization that works directly with the community promoting our services as that community then begins to trust your own organization.

Outcomes of the project

Many of the aims that we originally set out when undertaking the WTYL project have been met. We have had to make adjustments along the way attained more in depth knowledge of what was needed. Sometimes we met our targets in unexpected way as new partnerships were formed and led us to new ideas and possibilities regarding the way we provided our services.

The real success of the WTYL in Liverpool has been due to a willingness on our part to be flexible and also a sense from the beginning of the project to embed the project formally into our strategic planning. This meant that we could often meet the aims of the project by undertaking work to satisfy our internal targets.

Although this part of the WTYL project has formally ended many benefits have been gained such as a full picture of the communities and where they are located, new partnerships and a momentum in the direction of our work not only with RAS communities but with ethnic minority communities in general that will continue to be carried forward within Liverpool Libraries and Information Services.

Denise Jones 2007/08