



ISSN 1475-8202

The Network Newsletter: tackling social exclusion in libraries, museums, archives and galleries

Number 283, September 2024

(Formerly published as *Public Libraries & Social Exclusion Action Planning Network Newsletter*, issue 1, May 1999 – issue 29, September 2001)

The Network's Website is at www.seapn.org.uk and includes information on courses, good practice, specific socially excluded groups, as well as the newsletter archive.

Contents List

Equality, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion – Libraries, Museums, Archives and Cultural and Heritage Organisations

- “Farewell to the Asian Librarians and Advisors Group” – page 2

LGBTQ+ issues – Government, Government Agencies and Local Government

- “Trump’s Shameful Campaign Against Transgender Americans” – page 2

Abbreviations and acronyms – page 4

Equality, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion – Libraries, Museums, Archives and Cultural and Heritage Organisations

“Farewell to the Asian Librarians and Advisors Group”

I am very grateful to the Executive Committee of ALAG for giving permission for this article to be included in the *Newsletter* (as well as being published by CILIP¹) – see below.

LGBTQ+ issues – Government, Government Agencies and Local Government

“Trump’s Shameful Campaign Against Transgender Americans”

I have been surprised by how little focus there has been here on these massive changes to the law in the US, so wanted just to highlight this.

The headline is from an editorial² in *The New York Times* – here is the opening of their piece:

“Some of the most deplorable episodes in U.S. history involve the government wielding the power of the state against minority groups: Black people, Indigenous people and gay people, to name just a few. Though these campaigns might have received popular support at the time, history has consistently judged them as immoral, illegal and un-American.

Rather than understanding this history, President Trump is borrowing from the worst of it. One of the very first acts of his second term was to order the government to view gender as immutable and discriminate against transgender citizens. ‘As of today,’ he declared in his Inaugural Address, ‘it will henceforth be the official policy of the United States government that there are only two genders: male and female.’

The early days of Mr. Trump’s second term have raised any number of concerns about actions that run dangerously counter to both the laws and the best interests of the country and its people. But the chaos of these past few weeks shouldn’t mask that in this period, he has also waged as direct a campaign against a single, vulnerable minority as we’ve seen in generations.”

I am always impressed by the work of Laïla El-Métoui³, and she has recently posted on LinkedIn:

¹ The CILIP version is available at: <https://www.cilip.org.uk/news/692158/Farewell-to-the-Asian-Librarians-and-Advisors-Committee.htm>.

² *The New York Times*, 9 Feb 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/02/09/opinion/transgender-trump-orders.html>.

³ “Throughout her career, Laïla has been a fervent advocate for LGBTIQ+ rights. She is the Founder and CEO of Pride in Education and Educating Out Racism, and she

“I am outraged by the recent executive orders issued by the Trump administration in 2025 that directly attack the rights, dignity, and existence of transgender and non-binary people. These policies are not just cruel—they are a blatant attempt to erase and discriminate against an already vulnerable community.

Key attacks on trans rights:

- Federal agencies now only recognise gender based on sex assigned at birth, removing legal recognition for trans and non-binary identities.
- Trans people are banned from serving openly in the military once again.
- Trans youth are being denied life-saving gender-affirming healthcare.
- Schools risk losing funding if they allow trans women and girls to compete in women’s sports.
- Federal protections in housing, education, and healthcare are being stripped away.”

“But this couldn’t happen here” people say ...

Well, recent research⁴ from YouGov paints a grim picture:

“Where does the British public stand on transgender rights in 2024/25?”

“Here in the UK, the 2024 general election saw the Conservatives pledge to change the Equality Act to rewrite the definition of sex and allow organisations to bar transgender women from single-sex spaces, and that the concept of gender identity would not be taught to children. The increasingly popular Reform UK has criticised transgender ‘indoctrination’ and promised to ‘ban transgender ideology in primary and secondary schools’.

Now a new YouGov study, the fourth in a series reaching back to 2018, shows an increased scepticism towards transgender rights across the board – and particularly in the two and a half years since our previous wave of this study.

Notable in this most recent study – conducted in mid-December – is the growing resistance on transgender rights among those groups that are typically more permissive on the issue, like women and young people.

serves as an Equity and Wellbeing Consultant at LeImEducation. These roles have allowed her to provide equity education, training, and support, impacting hundreds of local and global corporate clients. Her work emphasizes inclusivity, and her conferences and content have yielded long-lasting positive results.” Taken from: <https://diversity-inclusion-speakers.com/speaker/laila-el-metoui/>.

⁴ Matthew Smith “Where does the British public stand on transgender rights in 2024/25?”, YouGov, 11 Feb 2025, <https://yougov.co.uk/politics/articles/51545-where-does-the-british-public-stand-on-transgender-rights-in-202425>.

In fact, the only question on which women now take the permissive view on transgender rights is saying that people should be able to change their gender socially, although at 55% this still represents an eight point drop since the 2022 survey.”

... and there is more, covering, for example, attitudes to the NHS providing treatments to support people transitioning, views on young people transitioning (and puberty blockers), and so on.

In terms of what libraries, museums, archives and the cultural sector provide and support, we need to be very clear what our role is (and not get drawn into further “culture wars”).

Abbreviations and acronyms

ALAG = Asian Librarians and Advisors Group

CILLA = Cooperative of Indic Language Library Authorities

This Newsletter was compiled by John Vincent, and all items are written by him, unless otherwise stated. Please send any comments or items for the next issue to:

John Vincent
Wisteria Cottage
Nadderwater
Exeter EX4 2JQ

Tel/fax: 01392 256045
E-mail: john@nadder.org.uk

September 2024 (published Feb 2025)



ALAG

Asian Librarians & Advisers Group

Farewell to the Asian Librarians and Advisors Group

On a sunny autumn afternoon, the Executive Committee of ALAG and a few members met at a lunch to bid farewell to the Group which was founded by Asian librarians in the Spring of 1983. To know why and how this group was formed, is to know its history.

The Asian communities from the Indian Subcontinent namely, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, India and Pakistan settled in the UK from many years, spoke different languages and had rich literary and cultural heritage. These communities in the main spoke Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi and Urdu languages and were spread throughout the nation. The mainstream public library services which were in existence for over several decades before was English centric and had not previously recognised the needs of other diverse communities.

It was only in mid-seventies, that the Home Office gave grants to local authorities under Section 11 to employ Specialist staff in Public Libraries to address the needs of these communities. Westminster Public Libraries led the way and was the first authority to make such an appointment followed by other London Boroughs, who availed this funding opportunity to employ Specialist Librarians to promote library services to Asian communities.

Since these services were not developed before, the Specialist Librarians had to start from scratch from getting to know and understand the structure and working of mainstream public library services and model Asian services in line with them. There were many challenges and struggles to set up and acquire library materials in diverse languages, whose scripts differed and to know the authors or acquire knowledge of the literature of respective regions and to establish contacts with local community groups to assess their library needs was a tall order by any imagination!

Library Authorities availed the opportunity of these new posts with no knowledge or awareness of what help, support and guidance would be required in developing these services and challenges for one person to fulfil this role.

The Home Office grant was for the employment of a Specialist Librarian, but funding for books, music, other materials came from Public library budget.

Again, the level of funding fell short of the demand. With all the constraints of staff and adequate resources, small collections of books and music were placed in library branches to reach out to local communities, who welcomed and avidly used the collections.

The Specialist Librarians worked to develop skills and provide expertise in all aspects of library services singlehandedly. They liaised with Asian booksellers and music suppliers to develop collections of interest to the communities to draw them into the libraries.

Apart from offering traditional services, a programme of outreach activities and contacts were developed to widen the scope and awareness of library resources amongst the community groups, who found library buildings daunting. Contacts were made to promote library resources within schools, prisons, patients and home libraries in the borough. A collection of library materials was placed in community centres where the staff liaised and facilitated joint ventures of literary, cultural and advisory activities for the benefit of the community.

With very little help from mainstream libraries and staff support, Asian Librarians worked in isolation and soon realised the need to build up a network of help and support external to their workplace. It was acknowledged that such a network would provide a knowledge base of essential contacts to exchange information, share ideas, skills and expertise as well as advice and experience from colleagues working in the field.

Hence, in Spring of 1983, after a Race Equality Conference at the Commonwealth Institute, London, a few likeminded Asian Librarians, mainly from the London Boroughs got together and formed ALAG (Asian Librarians and Advisors Group). At its inception, it co-opted with the Community Services Group of the then Library Association [5]. Although initially with a small membership, ALAG grew and diminished in line with library service provision trends but it remained an active, confident voice of Asian librarianship for over 40 years.

The group soon facilitated a programme of seminars, workshops, on various subjects relevant to Asian languages, literatures, music and culture and organised author talks, poetry sessions (popularly known as Mushaira), exhibitions and bookfairs. These events were held for greater understanding and awareness of literary and cultural heritage and to illustrate rich and diverse cultural norms and nuances of the subcontinent, not only to ethnic Librarians, but also to mainstream Librarians who had little exposure of the rich cultural traditions of South Asian people.

We are proud to have engaged celebrity speakers and personalities like Dr Ranjana Ash, (South Asian Literature Specialist) Naushad (Bollywood Music Director), Benjamin Zephaniah, (a renowned Black Poet), Saeed Jaffery (an Asian actor), Paul Boateng (an MP), as well as British Asian authors, performers, artists and other experts with diverse talents, who participated and graced our events.

⁵ Now the Community, Diversity and Equality Group (CDEG) of CILIP.

ALAG created projects on Bibliographies, Cataloguing and Transliteration rules to have uniformity of spelling and author names as these varied greatly in each language group. These services were well developed by participating in a co-operative called CILLA [6] for acquisition and inter library loans for Asian language books. Both the Asian book suppliers and Librarians found this a very useful service.

All the projects were well thought through to create greater understanding and appreciation of the Asian communities' rich cultural heritage.

The seminars on Asian literature, music and cultural heritage programmes were well attended from all parts of the country. The delegates appreciated the strong Asian flavour and fervour from food to dress, which added to the success of our organisation and the name of ALAG very quickly became associated with high quality and diverse specialist information.

Unfortunately, by the mid-nineties, as Section 11 Grants came to an end, Public Libraries authorities became gradually less interested and committed to these well-established services and soon reduced the staff and budget. In authorities where these services and staff survived, the Specialist Librarians worked with scant budget, but greater commitment within outreach services, to local community groups with the sole aim to make libraries accessible and relevant to their lives. But this was not sustainable.

When told of a closure of such a service run for elderly Asian women in a community hall, an elderly woman distraught with the news said, 'she looked forward to coming there as it was food for her soul.' Such services provided them with a meeting place with their own people, speaking in their own languages, overcoming their loneliness and ensured a sense of comradeship, socialising beyond library buildings, where librarians facilitated information on a variety of issues like health, welfare rights by engaging experts. It was also a platform to meet, greet and tell their stories and exchange experiences of living in Britain. These services were uniquely successful and valued.

Notwithstanding the progress made for a golden period of 20 years or so, when the cuts came, Asian and other ethnic services became the first casualty. The hard work, the contribution in development of these unique services, the first and foremost public library service to ethnic communities in Western Europe was relegated to history leaving no imprint in the sands of time. We lament the fact that with all our efforts to seek unity in diversity and make our services an integral part of the mainstream library services, Ethnic services remained separate and unequal.

Despite dwindling membership, (some due to retirement, others due loss of jobs and lack of interest in the Group's activities, due to the changing nature of their roles), the Chair, Gulshan Iqbal, the Secretary, Monna Rizvi and the Treasurer, Aruna Shah with the help of some members, carried on with successful projects such as Cityread, ImaginAsian, Reading Groups and cultural activities. ALAG's activities also captured interest from overseas with

⁶ The Cooperative of Indic Language Library Authorities.

librarians contacting the Group from Canada, Europe and India (Asian Library Association), to discuss ideas for future online collaborations. With sheer hard work and grace, the Executive Committee kept the ALAG flame burning for many more years.

The Pandemic brought challenging times for the team to meet and plan future activities, further limited in scope by no specialist staff or services in Public libraries, the Group became untenable. It was tough for the team to hold it together and was left with no choice but to dissolve the group. With a heavy heart, the Executive Committee decided to close the business of the Group, thanking all the past and present members and paid tributes for their support and contributions over the years.

With no future, and feeling of great sadness, the Group was disbanded after 41 years plus of its existence at a farewell lunch in the presence of a few members and booksellers who had mutually supported us over the years.

As library professionals, we are very proud of our achievements, the meaningful friendships we forged and the successful services we provided with limited resources. We thank all those who supported and joined us on this journey.

Farewell ALAG!

The Executive Committee: Gulshan Iqbal; Aruna Shah and Monna Rizvi

To find out more about ALAG's activities visit:

<https://asianlibrariansadvisersgroup.wordpress.com/>

