



# Executive summary

Welcome To Your Library (WTYL) is a national project connecting public libraries with refugees and asylum seekers, funded by Paul Hamlyn Foundation and co-ordinated through London Libraries Development Agency. By increasing opportunities for participation, WTYL aims to improve access to and the quality of public library services for everyone. This is the report of the external evaluation of the national phase of the project.

The evaluation took into account the progress of the project against its aims and objectives, the impact of the project based on the views of a range of stakeholders including refugees, and a review of the distance travelled by the project.

WTYL contributed highly relevant learning to public library service planning and delivery and provides good practice examples in relation to:

- Mapping need
- Developing project management skills
- Reaching refugee communities
- Building effective and sustainable partnerships
- Enhancing access
- Providing a range of effective projects that support community cohesion
- Enhancing non-project staff awareness of relevant issues.

This good practice is timely and relevant to the current challenges public libraries face in increasing access to services.

The defining feature of the national phase was the degree to which the participating library

services incorporated learning from the project into core services. This is of particular importance given that the strategic environment within which libraries operate puts great emphasis on mainstreaming practice in relation to contributing to compliance with efficiency targets, achieving community cohesion, and other strategic priorities.

The project's achievements of its aims and objectives and stakeholders' assessment of the impact of the project indicate that WTYL has largely been successful in fulfilling its intentions, and in doing so has made a strong and positive contribution to defining how best to support refugees and asylum seekers and the role public libraries can play.

The main learning points from WTYL are:

- The importance of effective planning and evaluation based on the mapping of need. Project work in this area has the potential to be a benchmark for public libraries in carrying out activities that enhance social inclusion. There also need to be mechanisms in place to ensure library staff's understanding of how to situate and promote the work of public libraries in the wider policy context, a role that is contingent on there being a recognised role for libraries in contributing to cross-sectoral agendas
- Where there has been effective ownership and leadership and willingness to change, services are making a real difference in their understanding and practice in relation to community engagement. Change management by chief librarians is key and enhancing their role in leading on social inclusion is vital

- The importance of partnership development at all strategic levels alongside community engagement cannot be over-stressed. WTYL has drawn out the need for this to be set within a long-term phased approach to partnership development to enable cross-sector skills sharing, innovation, and opportunities to apply with partners for funding to test and develop new ways of working.

The recommendations regarding how learning from the project can be applied more widely across library services with different audiences include the following:

- Creating an infrastructure for sharing information is key, and learning has to be centralised so that the overall library sector has access to resources that will assist them in planning and delivering community engagement activities. It is important that the development of such an 'information hub' is not 'left' as the responsibility of the WTYL project and The Network alone. This work needs to be nationally

co-ordinated, set within the overall context of the development of public libraries, and led by the Museum Libraries and Archives Council (MLA), Society of Chief Librarians (SCL) and other strategic bodies.

- This should be set within a long-term strategy that provides for:
  - Clear performance indicators relating to social inclusion, community cohesion and community engagement targets, including guidance on how to evidence outputs and outcomes
  - Support for chief librarians to engage with national policy and cross-sectoral agendas
  - Structural changes such as workforce development to ensure a diverse workforce.
- Establishing "critical friends" in positions of authority in other sectors with no direct connection to library service delivery in order to increase the interaction with cross-sector initiatives.