



# WELCOME TO YOUR LIBRARY

## Final report, December 2007

### **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)

More background information can be found at <http://www.welcometoyourlibrary.org.uk/>

### **LOCAL FACTORS**

Newcastle is a metropolitan city council at the heart of the Tyne & Wear (T&W) region with a population of 270 500 (mid 2006 estimate, Office for National Statistics (ONS)). It is a major cultural centre. Compared to the other partners in the Welcome To Your Library project, Newcastle has a low BME population of only 9.5% (ONS 2001 Census). However, compared to other parts of Tyne & Wear, this is high (e.g. only 1% in Sunderland). Across Tyne & Wear (and the north east of England), the majority of asylum seekers live in Newcastle. Newcastle formed a consortium with Gateshead, North Tyneside, South Tyneside and Sunderland councils to work effectively on Welcome To Your Library (WTYL).

Figures issued in May 2007 by the North of England Refugee Service (NERS), show that there were 1473 individual asylum seekers in Newcastle supported in National Asylum

Support Service (NASS) accommodation. Because of the relatively low numbers, actions resulting from the project will need to be highly targeted at specific refugee and asylum seeker (RAS) groups. There has also been a role for WTYL in informing people generally of asylum seeker issues so that they become more understanding and likely to accept RAS into the wider community.

Precise information on RAS changes frequently which can make planning difficult. According to its 2006/07 annual report, the biggest proportion of households supported by Newcastle's Asylum Seeker Unit (ASU) are "other", followed by Iranian, Congolese and Eritrean. The biggest proportion of households supported by the ASU live in Byker closely followed by the Walker, North West and Inner West areas of Newcastle.

As part of the libraries' modernisation process, Newcastle City Library was demolished in autumn 2006 and will be replaced with a new City Library, to be built on the current site. The new library will be ready in 2009. The interim period has presented us with some opportunities for creating new ways of working (e.g. reaching out beyond our buildings) and enabled staff to undertake any necessary development work. While the new City Library is being built, some services will be delivered from alternative city centre sites and others have been dispersed to branches.

## **WHAT HAS HAPPENED IN NEWCASTLE?**

Newcastle Libraries, Information & Lifelong Learning Service is part of the Tyne & Wear Consortium of *Welcome to Your Library (WTYL)*. The project is funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation and co-ordinated by the London Libraries Development Agency. It started in 2005, officially ended in November 2007, and has the objective of making public libraries more useful and accessible to refugee and asylum seeker communities. We hope that the activities initiated by WTYL will become an integral part of public library work in Tyne & Wear (T&W).

Inevitably, the closure of City Library in September 2006 will have had an impact on the many RAS that used the services provided here. However, we have been focusing much more on the services provided by our community libraries and there is currently a lot of emphasis on how we can contribute towards community engagement.

From October 2006, four of our community libraries extended their opening hours considerably, and general usage of these libraries has increased since then. Figures show that it was the right decision to extend the opening hours of these community libraries. However, it has yet to be decided whether these hours will be changed once the new City Library opens in 2009.

### **Aims of WTYL in Newcastle**

Newcastle produced a project plan with the following aims:

- Create a more structured regional approach across library services to how we meet the needs of RAS for the long term
- Identify what are the key issues and barriers for RAS in using public library services and solutions to overcome these
- Raise awareness and increase library use by RAS communities
- Develop public library staff skills and confidence in working with RAS

The above aims reflect those in the T&W WTYL project plan and are currently being worked on by both Newcastle staff and, where appropriate, the sub regional group.

## Summary of progress

### Key objective 1: **Create a more structured approach across library services to how we meet the needs of RAS in the long term**

During the lifetime of WTYL, we have shared the role of leading/chairing amongst the consortium. This has enabled responsibility to be taken on a more equal basis and has given myself and colleagues useful experience. Working as a consortium means we have been able to be much more strategic and coordinated. Although WTYL has officially ended we feel it is important to continue the good work we have started so we have set a programme of meetings for 2008. However, because of time constraints they will take place bimonthly.

We also plan to be involved in the 6 month additional phase of WTYL which will focus on disseminating what we have learnt, and Museums, Libraries & Archives North East (MLA NE) is supporting us in this. At our T&W meeting in October 2007, the consortium agreed to focus on the following areas during the additional phase:

- Regional advocacy/publicity
- Organisation development and change
- Impact on communities (linked into University of Northumbria at Newcastle evaluation by students)
- Dissemination of work across the region e.g. roadshow
- Volunteering

The emphasis will be on regional advocacy/publicity/raising libraries' profile. If we publicise what we have done well, this will benefit what we have done over the past 2 years, and the other 4 areas we are planning on working on will contribute to this.

WTYL continues to be included as an action in our service plan under our priority, "*to work towards quality customer service for all*". The service plan will undergo its annual review in January 2008. I will ensure that we will include sustaining WTYL beyond the life of the project in the new service plan. This will contribute to embedding what has come out of WTYL into the work of the service, as will involving and liaising with colleagues.

The T&W consortium produced a resource sharing policy which was officially implemented on 1 December 2007 although for some time Newcastle has been willing to lend out stock in other languages across the region (i.e. wider than T&W) free of charge through inter library loans. However, the policy had been a good way of formalising the arrangement across T&W and reminding staff that it exists.

In September 2007, Newcastle Libraries contributed to a feasibility study called "Newcastle Asylum Destitution Development Work". The study is about the needs of Newcastle's refugee sector organisations in relation to their work with destitute people (primarily 'failed' asylum-seekers), and how this work best can be developed. It is premised on an understanding that these organisations require additional developmental resources to do this work more effectively; that the needs fall within at least five broad areas (housing, food/toiletries, health and well being, community, and communication/ publicity/ lobbying); and that, given no single body has the capacity to address the issue, such resources must be provided on a 'strategic', 'collective' basis. Libraries fit into the broad areas, community and well being. Amongst other things, libraries offer safe welcoming places for people and free internet access. These views will be fed into the study. Currently, we are waiting for the feasibility study to be produced. Hopefully, this will help us progress work that has emerged from WTYL.

In October 2007, the Hard to Reach Officer Working Group renamed itself the “Promoting Inclusion Group” (PIG) as this better describes what we are working towards. It was also recognised that we haven’t got a clear remit or action plan for the group so I have agreed to produce a first draft based on events that are happening during 2008.

The MLA NE commissioned ERS, a regeneration and economic development consultancy (see [www.ers.org.uk](http://www.ers.org.uk)), to gather together information from authorities across the region re community engagement. In November 2007, two colleagues and I met two members of the ERS team to discuss this. I mentioned WTYL and after the meeting ERS telephoned me to find out more about the project. This information will contribute towards an advocacy document ERS are producing.

**Key objective 2: Identify what are the key issues and barriers for RAS in using public libraries services and solutions to overcome this**

We have promoted our citizenship stock and the 220 software, “Life in Britain” through a number of successful events:

- 2 events, 1 in East End and the other in Benwell Libraries on 23 & 26 April 2007
- Information stall at Grainger Market on 2 June 2007
- Mobile library in the west end on 20 June 2007 for Refugee Week
- Mela on 26 & 27 August 2007

We are also looking into the possibility of linking in with other citywide and/or corporate events, and investigating how best we can monitor usage of the citizenship stock and software.

I invited agencies who work with RAS to share our stall at the Mela at no extra cost to them. The Red Cross (the national arm that reunites people after disasters), Victim Support, and Newcastle Futures (who find employment for people) took us up on our offer. I felt this encouraged good partnership working and demonstrated libraries role as an information point.

Equalities Impact Needs Assessments (EINA) actions have been incorporated into the service planning process therefore equalities impacts will be assessed as part of any new service plan activities. We are continuing to review the ongoing EINA process by liaising with our directorate equalities and diversity officer.

The RAS Children’s Services Group has recently reviewed the final draft of a Newcastle RAS strategy and is waiting for a final version. Libraries have contributed to this strategy. We are also currently working with the Children’s Information Service to create links between their online directory (<http://newcastle.cyp-directory.org.uk>) and our website. This should help us create a list of agencies that staff can use to signpost people onto. This will in turn contribute to our Knowledge Management Framework which is currently being developed with the aim of helping our front line staff deal with customer enquiries.

During the lifetime of WTYL I have ensured that libraries are represented at the Newcastle citywide RAS group. This network of agencies that deal with RAS has proved to be an extremely useful way of both finding out about the broader issues facing RAS and other agencies, and promoting the way libraries can help RAS, which is often by working with partners. As well as bimonthly meetings, the group facilitates an email list so that information can be shared quickly and easily.

In 2006 we started asking users in our Public Library User Survey (PLUS) what language they liked to read. We are using this and other data (e.g. the Regional Language Network's Northern Language Survey 2006, the most requested languages from Newcastle City Council's Translation Unit as at June 2007, results from a survey we did at the Mela) to help us choose stock. In preparation for the new City Library opening in 2009, we have written a brief re community language stock based on the PLUS results and other data.

The research that the University of Northumbria at Newcastle (UNN) undertook in January 2007 on behalf of the T&W consortium did not throw up anything we didn't already know. However, the research findings provided us with useful evidence. Many of the recommendations in the research report are things we have started to do anyway as a result of WTYL e.g. more outreach work. We are hoping that a Masters student will help us evaluate some of the work that has come out of WTYL and are currently in discussions with UNN about this. In November 2007 I visited the RAS drop in group in Kenton who took part in the research to feedback to them and networked with other agencies that were there.

### **Key objective 3: Raise awareness and increase library use by RAS communities**

During the lifetime of WTYL we have established contact with RAS drop in groups in Kenton and Byker. I have also had contact with some RAS volunteers through Education Welfare's home language volunteer scheme. However, this has had limited success due to circumstances beyond our control. In the New Year I will follow this up. A colleague recently expressed an interest in using her language skills so I have been investigating potential opportunities for her. So far she had been involved in promoting our services at the Mela and there may be opportunities with the home language volunteer scheme.

We have improved information on libraries in welcome packs given to asylum seekers when they come into Newcastle by contributing to a leaflet that was produced corporately. The leaflets will be printed in the top ten languages of newcomers to the city, and will be sent to the asylum seekers unit at Your Homes Newcastle and other RAS housing providers.

Someone has recently been appointed to work on CityEye. A colleague is currently liaising with him to ensure we make some progress on the changes we suggested (e.g. we asked if the database could provide an accurate list of free events).

I continue to represent the Libraries, Information & Lifelong Learning on the corporate Community Engagement Officer Working Group. Community engagement continues to be very topical and important across the council and is now a compulsory section within our service plans. We are still getting used to the new system and protocols for obtaining approval for community engagement activities which was introduced across the council in April 2007. I have also been asked to regularly check and update corporate information on behalf of the library service. This is helping us think much more strategically about how we engage with the community, and inevitably work we do towards achieving the aims of WTYL will link into this. The corporate group is also arranging some community engagement training for staff and elected members so I have identified and nominated officers in the library service would most benefit from this.

Colleagues in the Promoting Inclusion Group are investigating how libraries can best promote their services at citizenship ceremonies. We are liaising closely with the citizenship coordinator who organises the ceremonies. We also hope to contribute to the citizenship pack given out at ceremonies. With some planning and thought this will be a good marketing opportunity for us

“Volunteers” has been on the agenda for T&W consortium meetings for some time now. Apart from Gateshead who has a dedicated volunteer coordinator, Newcastle and the other authorities have found this a challenging issue. We feel that there needs to be a corporate steer on this. At Newcastle, there is no corporate policy but it is something that has recently been discussed at the corporate community engagement group in terms of reimbursement of expenses. Volunteering is very topical and has come up in other areas of work I am involved in so I am hoping to develop something through another route. It is likely that this will come up again at consortium meetings in 2008, and we can learn from Gateshead’s experience.

In September 2007, I wrote an article for the NCCG (National Consortia Coordinating Group) newsletter on WTYL and the work of the T&W consortium as they wanted to hear about innovative projects around the UK (see [www.refugeeaccess.info](http://www.refugeeaccess.info)). As there had been a recent article on libraries in the newsletter my article has been put on hold for the time being.

#### Key objective 4: **Develop library staff skills and confidence in working with RAS**

In January 2007, the T&W consortium met with Helen Carpenter & John Vincent to discuss training. The main message was that there was no standard template we could use. We concluded that we needed to try out different things and see what works best. We also discussed how RAS training cannot be easily cascaded across a service through staff as potentially some very emotive issues can be raised and dealing with these requires specific skills. At this meeting I agreed to put in place some training for different members of staff:

- On 2 April 2007, the Promoting Inclusion Group (myself and 5 colleagues) attended a RAS awareness raising session run by Your Homes Newcastle’s Asylum Seeker Unit. This was a useful session which covered definitions and the process asylum seekers have to go through.
- Myself and 10 members of staff who work in different parts of Newcastle attended 3 sessions on social inclusion organised by John Vincent. These took place on 10 May 2007 in Sunderland, 21 June 2007 in South Tyneside and 20 September 2007 in Gateshead. John Vincent ran the first half of the session which was about the broader perspective, and NERS ran the second half which was about local issues. Feedback from attendees was very good. The course was particularly useful as it showed people how the issues affect everyone in society as well as the libraries.
- We have arranged for Individual organisational development and assessment (Ioda) training consultants (see [www.ioda.com](http://www.ioda.com)) to run 8 training sessions over 4 days in January 2008 with up to 100 members of our staff. Our Chief Executive’s Office, libraries’ training budget and WTYL are paying for this training. Ioda have delivered mandatory diversity and equalities training to all staff at Newcastle City Council which received good feedback. I have been liaising with Ioda to ensure that the training they deliver is practical and pertinent to libraries. By the end of this session the delegates will be able to
  - Determine the differences between an asylum seeker and a refugee;
  - Recognise the makeup of asylum seekers in Newcastle and the North East;
  - Identify issues or concerns in delivering a service to individuals within this community;
  - Implement changes in working practices.

The Ioda training will be evaluated using a form and I also plan to ring a random sample of attendees for feedback after the event. This will help us decide whether to run some more sessions for other members of staff (we have approximately 250 altogether).

In August 2007, I started gathering together practical information from enewsletters I receive. I have been emailing any information that I feel would be useful to front line staff to all our libraries and including the same information in our regular staff newsletter.

## CONCLUSIONS

Being part of the T&W consortium which is a partner in WTYL has certainly been a useful learning experience. Working as a consortium was difficult initially as we had to spend time getting to know one another and how the different authorities work. However, this later became a real strength as we were able to share ideas, resources and generally help each other out. Because we feel we have built up good working relationships over the past 2 years we have decided to continue to meet after WTYL has officially ended, and we all feel comfortable about contacting each other between meetings. The consortium is planning to be part of the additional 6 month phase of WTYL which is about raising libraries' profile/awareness amongst:

- The public through events, outreach and community engagement
- Staff through training, briefing sessions, emails and newsletters
- Other agencies both at high level (agendas, newsletters) and on a practical level through networking and partnership working

I feel that the main emphasis should be on other agencies at high levels as we haven't done as much of this and we need other agencies to recognise how libraries can support the work they do. If we get recognition at a high level this also means we are more likely to see results at grass roots level. However, I also feel we have learnt many valuable lessons and this needs to be disseminated regionally and nationally.

In many cases, making contact with RAS has been difficult for various reasons e.g. asylum seekers are a very transient population. In Newcastle, much of my time, especially initially, was spent networking as there are numerous agencies who work with RAS. Some of these agencies were able to put us in touch with RAS. With other agencies, I have met them only once so we can find out what each other does, then have agreed to keep in touch in case an opportunity arises where we can help each other out. Even making contact with or following up with some agencies has proved difficult partly because some staff in these agencies, like asylum seekers, are a transient population. Much of this is due to short term temporary employment contracts, unfortunately something beyond our control.

During the lifetime of WTYL I have been encouraging as many colleagues as possible to get involved in work that has come out of the project in order for people to take ownership and promote sustainability, and obviously, the more people involved the more we can do.

To conclude, in Newcastle, our WTYL legacy is to have greater knowledge and skill in working with RAS leading to improved service provision. WTYL has taught us to take a much more strategic, structured and coordinated approach which should result in more long term and effective working arrangements. Furthermore, work that has come out of WTYL has helped us with other important areas of work such as community engagement, customer service and promoting inclusion. Ultimately, improving services for RAS will improve services for everyone. This is the message I am trying to get across to others to encourage them to get involved too.