

Libraries of Sanctuary Resource Pack



City of Sanctuary

Introduction

Welcome to the Libraries of Sanctuary Resource Pack. To be clear, this is not a report with an executive summary to be read at one sitting, but rather a pack full of information and ideas, to be dipped in and out of as required.

The pack is published by City of Sanctuary which holds the vision that our nations will be welcoming places of safety for all and proud to offer sanctuary to people fleeing violence and persecution. Libraries have a long history of developing services for vulnerable groups, and this pack will enable libraries to effectively engage with sanctuary-seekers and to respond to their needs.

Although the focus is on people seeking sanctuary, many of the issues raised are applicable to any new arrivals, however long their length of stay, such as the "Windrush Generation" and economic migrants from inside and outside the EU.

The pack is aimed at public library staff, but is designed to be shared with all frontline staff and volunteers, council colleagues and elected members, and other stakeholders – as part of a briefing, to inspire and spread good practice, and to provide a starting point for conversations about local needs and solutions. An electronic version is available from the City of Sanctuary website, so individual pages may be printed as handouts or used in presentations.

The pack contains resources to support libraries do more to ensure they are open and welcoming to those seeking sanctuary. It will provide guidance for libraries working towards accreditation from City of Sanctuary groups, but also has general relevance to all library services.

Implicit in the pack is recognition of the important role libraries have to play in supporting and building strong communities. The pack is full of case studies regarding services aimed at those seeking sanctuary, but attention should also be paid to activities which break down barriers and foster understanding between different communities.

In this pack, we use people seeking sanctuary or sanctuary-seekers to mean people seeking asylum or people with refugee recognition.

Thimblemill Library, Sandwell becomes the UK's first Library of Sanctuary

On 1 March 2017, Thimblemill Library was named as the UK's first ever "Library of Sanctuary" by the City of Sanctuary movement, highlighting the active work and dedication to welcoming and supporting people seeking sanctuary and other new arrivals.



Thimblemill Library, Sandwell

Welcome

Welcome to Libraries of Sanctuary, an initiative to inspire, support and promote the use of public libraries as places of welcome for people seeking sanctuary in the UK.

This pack contains information and resources about seeking sanctuary in the UK and guidance on how your library can become a Library of Sanctuary, and be part of a network of libraries with principles of welcome and sanctuary at their core.

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Introduction to Sanctuary

City of Sanctuary

City of Sanctuary UK supports a UK wide network to build a culture of welcome for people seeking sanctuary. We promote understanding, recognition and celebration of the ways in which people seeking sanctuary enrich society. Our goal is to create a network of places that are proud to offer safety to people seeking sanctuary, with local communities being inclusive and welcoming.

The City of Sanctuary network began in October 2005 in Sheffield. Since then, we have supported the development of over 115 City of Sanctuary initiatives in towns and cities across the UK and Ireland. Our networks of local groups generally include people seeking sanctuary and bring refugee support and other organisations together.

Local groups usually work to gain support from organisations not in the refugee sector in their community, which can take the form of a support pledge.

Streams of Sanctuary

We believe the sanctuary message of welcome and inclusion is vital in all spheres of society and so, as well as supporting local groups, we are committed to working with professionals in communities of practice such as schools, health and maternity services, faith groups, theatres and arts centres, universities, and other focal points in local communities to become 'places of sanctuary'. A key element of these 'streams of sanctuary' is awareness-raising; giving a platform to the voices of people seeking sanctuary so that they can be heard by those who might otherwise never hear them. Libraries of Sanctuary is one of these 'streams'.

Libraries of Sanctuary

The Libraries of Sanctuary 'stream' is an initiative to recognise the good practice of libraries which welcome people seeking sanctuary and other new arrivals into their community and seek to foster a culture of welcome and inclusivity. Being located near a City of Sanctuary is not a prerequisite; in fact, libraries can play a major role in creating a welcome beyond their buildings and in the local community.

This pack aims to provide an overview of this particular stream and to demonstrate how a library can develop as a place of welcome, how it can apply for a Sanctuary Award, and as such become an accredited Library of Sanctuary.

Examples of services which are both available to everyone and targeted towards new arrivals

These include:

- Public-access computers
- After-school clubs and homework support
- Hosting housing surgeries
- IT taster sessions
- Job clubs
- Children's story-times
- Young people's clubs (eg. chess, film club) and activities (eg. choir)
- Organising a foodbank donation point in the Library eg as at **Thimblemill Library, Sandwell**
- Organising collections of other items, eg baby clothes, pushchairs, cribs, blankets and nappies also **Thimblemill Library, Sandwell**
- Provision of free sanitary products to support the community in combating period poverty

eg. **Brighton & Hove** Libraries run 'Give What You Can, Take What You Need' in the foyer of a library, where anyone can donate toiletries and sanitary products and anyone can take what they need. It is unstaffed, just near the entrance to the library and discreet for those who want to take any products

see also:

Norfolk Library and Information Service's The Tricky Period [↗](#)

There are also examples of libraries organising or hosting health activities, again open to all but targeted towards and welcoming new arrivals, such as:

- Yoga sessions
- Health walks
- Gentle exercise classes and exercise sessions for children
- Adult colouring sessions
- Keep fit classes
- Slimming group
- Weekly Health Monitoring sessions with Public Health
- Story Walks eg in **Oldham** where the library has organised well-received dual-language Story Walks – participants said:

'I liked making and decorating the spiral snake'

'I enjoyed the crafting and eating food'

'I enjoyed the story time learning the Bangla word'

'I enjoyed learning my mum's language which is Bangla and I enjoyed making Max my snake'

'Thank you for a great event'

Libraries of Sanctuary

Why become a Library of Sanctuary?

Key benefits of becoming a Library of Sanctuary include:

- **Extending the reach of the library, bringing in a wider range of people, both to access the tailored services, and to raise their awareness of other activities available**
- **Strengthening partnership-working to deliver much needed services to local communities, and extending the range of partners who want to work with us**
- **Placing the library as a community hub at the heart of its community**
- **Demonstrating that the library has something to offer new arrivals**
- **Gaining recognition from elected members and senior officers that the library service can deliver many key council priorities**

How to become a Library of Sanctuary

There are three processes that underpin the commitment needed to become a Library of Sanctuary. These are:

Learn: learning what it means to be seeking sanctuary; in general and particularly in the context of mental wellbeing and information/support needs.

Embed: taking positive action to embed concepts of welcome, safety and inclusion within the library, including, but not limited to, other library users and library staff and volunteers.

Share: sharing your vision, achievements, what you have learned, and good practice with other library services, the local community and beyond.

These processes are outlined here, and there are then examples of activities and actions listed in the following section on the Library of Sanctuary Award.

Sanctuary Awards

Sanctuary awards are provided by the network of local groups and City of Sanctuary UK to recognise and celebrate mainstream organisations' commitment to our values and vision of welcome and inclusivity and enabling them to become active participants in the City of Sanctuary network. It is an opportunity to celebrate and share good practice as well reflect on how practice can be improved.

There is more information about the Awards at: www.cityofsanctuary.org/awards

Library of Sanctuary Award

The City of Sanctuary network recognises and celebrates libraries which can show evidence of making welcoming and inclusive provision for people seeking sanctuary and other vulnerable migrants through the Library of Sanctuary Award.

Local groups can award any library or information-giving community resource centre/community hub which can provide evidence that they have followed our core processes.

Any library can apply for a Library of Sanctuary award. Applicants should start by making a public commitment to becoming a Library of Sanctuary, endorsing the City of Sanctuary charter, and agreeing to its values and principles with a commitment to embed these as appropriate within their own context.

See: www.cityofsanctuary.org/about

Applications should provide evidence under the 3 core processes:

learn, embed and **share**

and should reflect a whole-organisation approach within the context of the library. Please try to keep applications short, ideally less than 200 words per example provided within each of the processes.

Libraries will vary, and we would expect their strengths to be reflected across the opportunities and reach of their particular resources and context.

The examples below are suggestions for the kind of activities that libraries might undertake in order to demonstrate the three core processes. These examples are not finite – they simply provide an indication of the kind of activities for which appraisal groups would be looking.

1 Learn about what it means to be seeking sanctuary

Show evidence of how your library service raises awareness among paid staff and volunteers about people seeking sanctuary, their needs, experiences and the challenges of living in the UK. The key criteria that will be considered by the assessment panel include: Were all staff, including support staff, made aware of the experiences, barriers and entitlements of different migrant groups in the UK? Were staff involved in work towards better practice for these groups? Has staff awareness of the issues increased?

Examples of activities could include:

- **Organising training and learning activities** for staff and volunteers to raise awareness of the experiences of people seeking sanctuary and other new arrivals – for example, **Birmingham Libraries** and **Newcastle Libraries** have organised short training courses for their staff.
- Providing staff with **up-to-date knowledge about local communities**, with particular reference to people seeking sanctuary, including countries of origin, language skills, religious affiliations, and other cultural characteristics – and also equipping staff with the knowledge to be able to find out and keep current with this information themselves. **Newcastle Libraries** included a session in their training course from the city's City of Sanctuary officer, looking at current information about the local community, focusing on where new arrivals have settled and where they have come from, and giving details of local organisations that library staff themselves could contact for further information.
- Working with other parts of the local authority to **pool information about people seeking sanctuary** in your area eg **North Ayrshire Council Libraries** met with colleagues in Housing, Education and Community Learning to find out how many Syrian refugees were expected, where they would be housed, and any other relevant demographic information.
- Ensuring that **staff are aware of the likely sensitivities and fears** of people seeking sanctuary, especially those who have experienced persecution, torture or violence – see, for example, the City of Sanctuary website where there is background information on – and a list of organisations to support – LGBTQ+ sanctuary-seekers, cityofsanctuary.org/by-theme/lgbtq/
- Ensuring supporting staff are **mindful of possible threats** to the safety of users and staff, especially from those who are hostile to people seeking sanctuary and other migrants. **Norfolk Library and Information Service** are reporting points for hate incidents and hate crimes in support of the 'Stop Hate in Norfolk' protocol.
- Giving staff **encouragement and time** to explore key background resources and other reading materials.



- Inviting organisations that support people seeking sanctuary to share their learning and provide awareness-raising sessions in the library, and, where possible, arranging for library staff to visit support projects. This will include consultation with and **involvement of people seeking sanctuary in staff training**, identifying barriers and action-planning for embedding welcome and appropriate resources, for example,

Bolton Library & Museum Services held a launch consultation party in June 2019. A party was one way to ensure attendance – over 200 more people than usual attended on the day – there was plenty of food for all and there were also activities for children so it was a family occasion. In advance, the staff reached out to various organisations that work with people seeking sanctuary, asking them to spread the word that all were welcome to come along. Library staff gave a brief talk before the party about the potential future of the library and how the local community could help shape this future.

A short questionnaire was then handed out. It listed some possible future events and let people register their level of interest in these. It also gave people an opportunity to propose their own ideas for library events and groups, and the library used the responses from this consultation to shape some of the events that followed including buying a Play Station console; partnering with Bolton College to offer two separate beginners' English classes per week in term-time; organising knitting groups; and organising health and wellbeing groups.

Kirklees Libraries have been working to raise awareness of sanctuary-seeking with staff and volunteers via training and by Sanctuary Team staff attending service-wide meetings, Friends and volunteer meetings, wider council service meetings and at partner events to highlight the idea of a Library of Sanctuary and to give progress updates. Information is also disseminated by newsletters, bulletins and social media. In addition, they have recently had a month of collecting examples of the impact of the service, focusing on examples linked to Sanctuary with relevant 'stories' being highlighted across the whole service.

Kirklees Conversation Group

This is a free, informal session run on a drop-in basis for people who have English as a second language to improve both their written and spoken English. Each week a short lesson or subject is introduced by the facilitator, tailored to the needs of the group, and everyone is encouraged to join in the conversation. It is not a formal English language course and is designed to complement courses such as ESOL.

Current, regular attendees are mostly women and range in age from 20-62 years old, from a variety of communities including Hungarian, Romanian, Pakistani, Indian, Kurdish and Syrian. These sessions not only help individuals to learn English, but also provide opportunities for improving employability, promoting confidence and independence, reducing social isolation and making new friends.

Improving people's reading means they can enjoy books, read to their children and access written information: for example, one of the participants has said:

The sessions 'made me more confident and encouraged me to practise more English in daily life. I am now less shy about reading to others and talking in English. I enjoy talking to others in the group. I know I have improved.'

2 Take positive action to embed concepts of welcome, celebration and inclusion

The key issues which the appraisal panel would be concerned with include evidence of embedding in the organisation's policies and procedures and evidence of positive action your service has taken to embed, monitor and evaluate good practice.

Some examples of the ways in which this could happen include:

- Actively creating a welcoming and safe environment for all new arrivals, including people seeking sanctuary. Initiatives could include:
 - making sustained efforts to bring refugee and migrant communities into your library;
 - displaying a City of Sanctuary welcome sticker in a window at the entrance of the library and/or a welcome sign in multiple languages;
 - creating a dual-language library guide;
 - ensuring that resources relevant to individual needs, cultures, age and experience are available;
 - organising tours of the library and help with joining, and targeted activities.

Stirchley Library, Birmingham take part in 'welcome walks' within the locality, where newly arrived families are familiarised with the area.

In August 2019, at Exeter Library, **Libraries Unlimited** gave tours to families of people seeking sanctuary, and some 80 people joined the Library in the sessions. They also organised craft activities for them to take part in over three days.

In Flintshire, **Aura Leisure & Libraries** have been supporting the welcome for Syrian families, for example by opening the library and museum and organising a tour, and then arranging swimming sessions; in 2019, they arranged use of a room in the Deeside leisure centre for art and then offered skating free of charge and this proved a terrific way of introducing the Syrian families to local people.

In 2019, **Gloucestershire Libraries** held a 'Welcome to Stroud Library' event for Syrian families, where they could sign up for the Summer Reading Challenge and join in with the events.

Kirklees Libraries have created a multi-language 'Welcome' poster for each library with large pull-up banners to be created for larger libraries. In addition, each library is creating individual 'Welcome' tri-fold leaflets to highlight key services in an easily accessible format using images and limited text.

Manchester Libraries have organised 'The Great Get Together', events used as a way of engaging local communities and raising awareness of the work they are doing to become libraries of sanctuary.

Norwich received its first five Syrian families in February 2017 – **Norfolk Library and Information Service's Millennium Library** hosted the induction training programme for volunteers.



Abraham Moss Library, Manchester

Each person seeking sanctuary has become a member of the library and is actively encouraged to use the facilities available as well as to join in with groups such as English Exchange 'A friendly group for those wishing to practise their English as a second language. The group is open to all learners whether going to a formal class or not', [↗](#)
They also organised craft activities such as 'Drop in and Draw' and 'Colour Me Calm'.

North Ayrshire Council Libraries purchased a collection of books in Arabic, and located them in the library nearest to where Syrian new arrivals would be settled.

In **Powys**, Ystradgynlais Library welcomed Syrian families who had arrived via the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme, by locating potential English language learning websites, helping people to get online, and then assisted with a range of practical issues, such as sorting out their phones, helping them find their way around the area, eg when/where the vegetable market stall was available, where to catch buses etc, and also provided a free space for the group to meet to practise English before the official lessons started.

Shropshire Libraries' Gobowen Library has worked with Refugee Action to link up with two families in Gobowen, and, in February 2019, they held a 'Welcome to the library' event hosted by the Friends of Gobowen library. They also hold regular monthly Syrian Social events in Gobowen as well as issuing specific invitations to the families, for example for a half-term children's activity – there is a very active Friends group which befriends and helps families to fit into the community.

Greater Manchester Libraries of Sanctuary project

Greater Manchester Libraries of Sanctuary is a joint project between Manchester, Oldham and Bolton local authority library services. The project is funded by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. Through this project we aim to help build the confidence, self-esteem and resilience of local communities, to provide opportunities for people from different communities and backgrounds to mix socially and build relationships, by offering a programme of activities, supported by staff training and a volunteering programme. Nine Greater Manchester libraries, across three local authorities, will become Libraries of Sanctuary, with learning shared across all Greater Manchester authorities.

In addition to attaining the award, the project will result in:

Increased sustainable partnerships with organisations related to asylum seekers, refugees and migrants.

Increased activities in these libraries, developed in conjunction with the local community.

A cross-authority celebration and networking event.

Learning from the project will be shared leading to at least 20 accredited Libraries of Sanctuary across Greater Manchester.

All three library services programme activities as part of Refugee Week and Black History Month.

Abraham Moss Library, Manchester



Oldham Libraries

- **Making sustained efforts to address the language, administrative, cultural and other barriers** that may affect the accessibility of library services for sanctuary-seekers [see Section 5]

- **Embedding work on becoming a Library of Sanctuary** into the mainstream for example, **Kirklees Libraries** have set up a working party, with representatives from all levels of staff, which meets monthly with a specific set of outcomes through which they are reviewing the existing offer and support, evaluating ongoing need, and identifying and implementing actions they can take to engage with the **Learn, Embed** and **Share** principles.

- **Ensuring that services are both available to everyone and targeted towards new arrivals**, eg cultural activities to include new arrivals, book stock includes works by people seeking sanctuary. Through your collections, displays and activities, you can provide information to the wider community about the realities of sanctuary-seekers' lives, as well as supporting people seeking sanctuary themselves and celebrating their achievements, and helping with understanding what has led them to become people seeking sanctuary.

Norfolk Library and Information Service are in the process of developing new partnerships with Norwich International Youth Project (NIYP – see: niyp.org.uk) which supports unaccompanied children in Norwich, Bridge Plus, a BAME organisation which aims to improve community cohesion, and English Plus, a charity that supports new communities in Norwich to learn English, form friendships and settle in the city. The aim in doing this is to build on and strengthen the library's work with people seeking sanctuary, and the work they will be undertaking with NIYP will see the Millennium Library host a visit for a group of unaccompanied young people aged between 11 and 25 years of age, introducing them to the library and issuing them with library cards and focusing on aspects of the library offer that are likely to appeal to that age group. There are also plans, working with NIYP, to host a creative writing course for them in March/April 2020.

- **Signposting new arrivals to local services**, helping them understand 'how things work' in the UK: for example, the conversation groups in **Kirklees Libraries** support participants with advice and information and encourage them to access other services and activities.

In **Norfolk Library and Information Service**, the People from Abroad Team (PFAT) is a team of social workers based in the Norwich Millennium Library. The team delivers community-based social work to people who face additional barriers to accessing traditional services because of their immigration status. Many have no entitlement to welfare benefits or public-sector housing and speak little or no English. The focus of the team is to promote the independence of their clients to achieve full integration into the community, and they have ensured that each family that they have supported has become a member of the library service and has been actively encouraged to join in with regular events and activities;

Smethwick Library, Sandwell is working closely with Brushstrokes see: brushstrokessandwell.org.uk delivering talks at their bi-monthly orientation sessions at their new base for recently-dispersed people seeking sanctuary. This offers an opportunity for new arrivals to come and hear from a number of agencies about what is available and how to access services, eg the police, health, the Sandwell Transition Education Partnership Service school, and the Local Authority Asylum Support Liaison Officer.

- **Ensuring the responsible local authority or other organisation understands and supports** the library's commitment as a Library of Sanctuary.



Newcastle Library Service IT volunteers

Newcastle Libraries have formed the Get Online Newcastle partnership with Your Homes Newcastle to provide digital training to local residents. Amongst the volunteers who support people learning IT skills are people seeking asylum – as Lisa Dawson (ICT Inclusion Officer) says:

'I do feel that Libraries are the perfect place for us to engage with new visitors to our country and I do believe that they think of us as a safe and friendly environment, which to some people can make all of the difference.'

One of the volunteers has written:

'I am willing to share my experiences as a volunteer at the Newcastle City Library. I enjoy my volunteering role as an IT support worker helping all Ages, Gender and Nationalities. I studied computing previously but because of my prolonged on-going asylum case, I'm not able to utilise my skills, and the role I play in Newcastle City Library helps me keep up to date with my skills, thanks to the opportunity that Lisa gave me to be part of her amazing team helping the community from all backgrounds and religions. And I feel so good putting smiles on our attendees' faces by helping with whatever IT issue, even the challenging issues, because I'm surrounded by skilled volunteers.'

This opportunity has improved my social life greatly by interacting in society. I've also learned of so many social opportunities that I could get involved in to become a valuable member of society. I would always be grateful as I used to feel neglected and excluded from the society because of the prolonged asylum case and am still living in limbo not knowing what the future holds.'

- **Consulting regularly** with people seeking sanctuary, providing volunteering and training opportunities for them, and encouraging them to have their say about the services the library offers them: for example, **Kirklees Libraries** already have new arrivals volunteering in libraries and they are looking at working in partnership with Connecting Opportunities (part of Migration Yorkshire, see: migrationyorkshire.org.uk/connecting-opportunities) to offer supported work experience/volunteering opportunities to a broader range of people seeking sanctuary. They are reviewing their current range of roles to improve diversity amongst the volunteer team, and, again, their engagement project will guide this work.

- **Monitoring and evaluating** what people seeking sanctuary think about your library service eg the promotion, accessibility and welcoming nature of the service, involving them in this process: at the time of writing, **Kirklees Libraries** are planning to deliver an engagement project involving people seeking sanctuary and other new arrivals. This will focus on views and experiences of libraries and broader experiences of integration.



Manchester Libraries

- **Engaging local readers** in books and other library materials about sanctuary – have a permanent section for stories of sanctuary, which broadens understanding and advocates for new arrivals, and promotes messages of cohesion and inclusion.

- **Providing/promoting space** in your library for ESOL classes as they do at **Aberdeen City Libraries**, and **Thimblemill Library** and **Smethwick Library**, Sandwell, and in **Merton Libraries** where, according to the NATECLA *Framework*:

['Merton Home Tutoring Service] organises training courses for volunteers who would like to teach English in a one to one capacity with the learner at home or in a local facility such as a library'; or conversation clubs (which could be led by either Adult Learning Services or FE colleges or volunteers connected with organisations offering support to people seeking sanctuary); legal, health and other advice sessions; and children's activities

Manchester Libraries work with Manchester Adult Education Services to bring 'Talk English' sessions to various libraries across the city. 'Talk English' supports speakers of other languages to learn and improve their English through a number of initiatives delivered in the community and at cultural and leisure organisations in areas of Greater Manchester, North West England and West Yorkshire;

Suffolk Libraries run 'Chat and chill' sessions – 'The "Chat and chill" model is aimed at women who are newly arrived to Britain and whose English is very limited. It's not an ESOL course; it's a group to help women acclimatise to British culture and it equips them with everyday skills such as making doctor's appointments, how to chat with your child's teacher, etc.,

■ **Providing meeting space** in your library for voluntary refugee support organisations and groups offering support and friendship to people seeking sanctuary eg:

Stirchley Library, Birmingham works in partnership with Kings Heath Action for Refugees who have recently delivered a 'hope not hate' training course from the Library.

Norfolk Library and Information Service have provided educational activities for school groups working in partnership with local schools and the 'Friend Ship', a local Community Interest Company, who share 'arts skills with displaced people in their new communities & running activist workshops using the arts to bring about positive social change' see:

thefriendship.wixsite.com/thefriendship

They have worked with the 'Friend Ship' on a number of projects, starting in 2017 when four local schools were invited to take part in a series of workshops exploring the issues of persecution, identity, having to flee your home and the importance of sanctuary. Through taking part in various creative activities and hearing the stories of displaced people, the pupils taking part were encouraged to develop a sense of empathy and understanding of others.

The work created at these workshops was displayed in the Norwich Millennium Library during Refugee Week in 2017;

Thimblemill Library, Sandwell hosts welfare sessions; one-to-one support sessions on asylum issues; befriending courses; and Bearwood Action for Refugees runs 'Welcome to your area' events and tea and toast sessions/coffee mornings, co-organised with library staff.



Thimblemill Library, Sandwell

■ **Promoting community cohesion**, for example by providing opportunities for interaction, eg via ESOL groups; meeting/working together; supporting people seeking sanctuary's engagement with citizenship activities; creating opportunities for volunteering (the conversation groups run, for example, by **Kirklees Libraries** and **Suffolk Libraries** provide good opportunities for interaction, and for library staff to signpost other resources/facilities.

■ **Ensuring community engagement** through consultation and outreach work with refugee (and other) support organisations eg **Norfolk Library and Information Service** have worked in partnership with 'New Routes Integration'

'We run a range of projects that bring people together in an informal and friendly atmosphere to learn new skills and meet new people. Our activities and clubs are practical, creative, hands-on activities, to deliver an ESOL workshop to 25 children aged between 5-12 and their families. As well as a story-time session, the group was shown the resources we hold including books in a range of different languages and dual language books, etc and took part in craft and Lego activities to encourage them to come back and take part in our regular events.'

newroutes.org.uk

Shropshire Libraries works with 'Shropshire Supports Refugees', including visiting their Women's Group to gift dual-language and Bookstart packs, providing a general library induction, organising four Rhyme Time sessions to the same group, culminating with a visit to Shrewsbury Library for a tour and induction and Rhyme Time; this group consisted of families from all over Shropshire (8 children 12 adults). They have also worked with the 'Shropshire Supports Refugees' Craft and Chat Group and volunteers, including creating a dual-language story sack on an Arabic folk tale.

■ **Promoting and celebrating** contributions of sanctuary-seeking/migrant communities within your localities to act as a medium of positive communication between people seeking sanctuary and local communities. For example,

Aberdeenshire Libraries organised a project with Syrian New Scots, '**A Taste of Syria**' – they supported the group to make a film about the Syria they had left behind for a Book Week Scotland event. One of the young boys had limited English, but they arranged for an interpreter who translated his story, and 'there wasn't a dry eye in the house. The film wasn't perfect but it did make those viewing it think more deeply about the New Scots they had in their communities.

About a year later, they organised another three events in the communities where Syrian New Scots were living, but this time they provided lovely Syrian sweets themselves. The same young man who did not have the words in English to tell his story previously now had the ability to do so on his own';

Shropshire Libraries organised a **Refugee Week Culture Day** in Shrewsbury Library in June 2019 – this was a celebration event including: writing names in Arabic calligraphy; the launch of the dual-language story sack for pre-schoolers; African drumming workshops; story-reading for older children; exhibitions, with an Arabic cultural display area and refreshments, and a schools exhibition.

Manchester Libraries organised an exhibition, 'A Perilous Journey – **Stories from Syrian Refugees**', about a trilogy of comics based on testimonies taken from Syrian refugees seeking asylum in Scandinavia in July 2015. The three Syrians in the story (names changed for their protection) have now thankfully been given asylum;

Manchester Libraries also organised a '**Triple Language Story Session**' in Yoruba, Farsi and English at Longsight Library, as part of Manchester Libraries programme in the 'Journeys Festival International Manchester', with volunteers reading the story in their mother tongue.

'The story session was absolutely fantastic. There were 12 children with accompanying parent/carers. It was truly amazing to see how the toddlers and babies responded to the sound of different languages being spoken. One by one they all became mesmerized. Parents/carers really enjoyed and completely saw the value in the session. One mum was delighted that the story was being delivered in her mother tongue Farsi'.

Kent Libraries, Registration and Archives exhibited the 2019 **Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children Art Project**, which was warmly received by local people [see case study, page 21].

'We love this – we came especially from Crumpsall and we have had a wonderful time – thank you so much'

'The mums have enjoyed the crafts even more than the children – what a great afternoon'

'It is great to learn about different cultures and how we all want the same thing – safety, security and a good future for ourselves and our children'

'I have never tried these foods before – they are unusual and I really liked the sweets!'



Oldham Libraries

Manchester: North City Library and Abraham Moss Library

Following their **'Great Get Together'** event in June 2019, North City Library has been running a monthly Sanctuary Social and Film Club event on Saturday afternoons from 2-4pm. These have taken the form of relaxed sessions for adults and children of crafts and chat over tea, coffee and snacks. Children and teens can watch the films which have been themed around travel and journeys including *Paddington*, *Polar Express* and *The Snowman*.

The library has created a display of bunting in different languages alongside a variety of related books for adults and children/young people including the **'Travelling Library'** from the Journeys Festival international – see: journeysfestival.com/literature

One craft activity was based on empathy, and children and adults were asked to imagine leaving home and packing a bag for a journey to an unknown destination – what would they need and want to take? Pets, favourite food, cuddly toys, friends and more? This activity was also included in an outreach visit to the People's History Museum along with the **'Travelling Library'**.

Another recent Sanctuary Social craft activity to celebrate winter festivities included making festive baubles so that people could write their messages of peace in their own languages if they wished, and the library staff hung them on their Christmas tree. They also made and decorated paper lanterns to decorate the tree (or for people to take home). This was followed by festive treats to eat from a variety of cultures including traditional Christmas cake, German Stollen cake, Asian festive sweets and savoury snacks and popcorn plus tea, coffee and exotic fruit juice.

A recent recruit to the Sanctuary Social events has been Alaa, whose family are currently seeking asylum in the UK. She is a chemistry graduate from UAE and has volunteered to help out with a number of activities. She had never been involved in arts or crafts activities with children previously and it was all a complete revelation to her. She said:

'I really enjoyed this – it was fun and really nice to help these families'.

In December 2019, following a month on display at North City Library, the PositiveNegatives exhibition "Fleeing the Unknown" moved to Abraham Moss Library. It tells the story of Merha and her journey from war-torn Eritrea to the safety of the UK. From January 2020, the exhibition will continue its tour of libraries in the North Manchester area.

Library staff have engaged with many people in conversation about the issues around migration, asylum-seeking and refugees. People said that, as refugees, they were looking for access to IT at the Library so they could find news from their countries and get news of friends and relatives. They also saw it as an opportunity to make friends and to keep loneliness and alienation at bay. Coming to the Library offered them help with practising their English, help with paperwork and information about food banks, **Citizens Advice sessions** and other sources of help such as language classes. In some cases, library staff have found people who have knowledge and experience to impart about previous episodes when people sought sanctuary, such as the Kosovan crisis in the 1990s.



North City Library, Manchester



North City Library, Manchester



Abraham Moss Library, Manchester

Share your vision and achievements

The appraisal panel will be seeking evidence of wider public and community involvement as well as information about other libraries taking an interest in becoming Libraries of Sanctuary. A possible question to consider would be: Would any of the activities engage the local community and/or library users in wider sanctuary issues and/or understanding of these issues? Who else has engaged with the activities or been inspired to develop their awareness or undertake celebration work?

Some examples include:

- **Raising awareness and educating** others in the libraries network about your work with new arrivals

- **Sharing resources, good practice and commitment with and supporting other libraries interested in developing this area of work** eg in **Smethwick Library, Sandwell** they have been delivering information talks to undergraduate and post-graduate students about Smethwick and the surrounding area. The students visit Cape Hill, high street shops, the Food Bank, Brushstrokes and Smethwick library – their talks include how the library service offers to support newcomers, finding out about migration and ways in which the community has changed.

- **Partnership - working at strategic and local levels** by forming links with other statutory and non-statutory services to maximise awareness-raising, optimise cross-service training opportunities, share your vision and inspire others.

- **Promoting on your noticeboard** and via your website and other communication channels your 'Sanctuary' commitment and encouraging your partners and others to join in.

- **Promoting of exhibitions/displays/presentations/public meetings** about the issues affecting people seeking sanctuary and which explore or tell the story of their experiences whenever the opportunity arises.

- **Supporting or participating in national initiatives and awareness-raising campaigns** that promote a greater understanding of the experiences of people seeking sanctuary and other migrants and their cultural contributions – eg Refugee Week for example, in **Norfolk Library and Information Service**, the Millennium Library has a long track record of delivering talks, events and hosting exhibitions in support of Refugee Week and Black History Month, including exhibitions of works created by Norwich International Youth Project and talks by Kindertransport survivor Joe Stirling.

In October 2018, the talk on the Windrush Generation included an impromptu speech from Sir John Bird, founder of the *Big Issue*, who spoke about his experiences of attitudes towards Irish immigrants in London in the 1950s.

Refugee Week 2020 will see the Millennium Library exhibiting the Schools of Sanctuary wall hanging which was created collaboratively by pupils from primary and secondary schools and people seeking sanctuary. The artwork was inspired by the experiences of local people who have sought sanctuary in Norfolk and consists of textile squares of artwork inspired by their stories and other stories of seeking sanctuary.

■ **Publicising commitment, achievements and aspirations through professional journals, conferences, and in the media:** for example, **Brent Culture Service** wrote about their project to share stories from local residents in 'Brent Culture Celebrating Windrush 70', [🔗](#)

The Libraries Taskforce wrote briefly about the work in **East Sussex Libraries** to build partnerships with a local project supporting refugee, asylum seeker and new migrants, where they are running weekly rhymetime sessions to support pre-school children in improving their English, and school-readiness', [🔗](#)

Janene Cox, Commissioner for Culture and Communities, Staffordshire, gave a presentation, 'Inclusion for Refugees and Asylum Seekers' at the CILIP Public & Mobile Libraries Group Conference, "**Chances for Life: Public Libraries Supporting Social, Digital and Economic Inclusion**", 2017 [🔗](#)



Abraham Moss Library, Manchester



Photo by Code Ninja on Unsplash

“The professional support that the team at Thimblemill have given to Stirchley Library has been wonderful. It has resulted in greater collaboration across neighbouring local authorities and a deeper understanding of what it means to be a “Library of Sanctuary”.



Thimblemill Library, Sandwell

How does your organisation intend to build on your achievements?

This section of the application form provides opportunities to share your strategic planning. Receipt of the Sanctuary Award is just the beginning of ongoing development of practice and activities, it is the inspiration for continuing commitment towards the vision for sanctuary for all. The questions an appraisal panel might ask include: Has the library demonstrated a sustainable commitment to improving access and service experience for migrants in vulnerable circumstances? What evidence is there that this commitment will continue after the award is granted (for example: is it embedded in a mission statement, and in strategic planning, policies and procedures?)

Active sanctuary-seeker/migrant voice

All applications for a Sanctuary Award will be expected to involve people seeking sanctuary and/or migrants in the evaluation/monitoring or delivery of activities for each of the processes, as appropriate.

Self-evaluation

Do staff and others involved feel that the organisation has fulfilled the criteria for the three processes?

Feedback from others involved

Has feedback from the local community, library users or the support sector for people seeking sanctuary been taken into account? Have there been any changes or actions arising from the activities?

Feedback from sanctuary-seeker/migrant involvement

It is always useful to have comments from people seeking sanctuary or other migrants who have engaged with any aspect of the organisation's work.



Leicester New Walk Museum

Minimum criteria

All applicants for Sanctuary Awards are expected to meet the following minimum criteria:

1 Offer a positive vision of a culture of welcome and hospitality to all by **making a public commitment to the City of Sanctuary vision of welcome** through endorsement of the charter, through becoming a supporting organisation and signing the local group pledge of support where relevant.

2 **Celebrate and promote** the welcome and contribution of people seeking sanctuary through your library/organisation's website and social media and other channels, committing to a culture of welcome.

3 **Promote understanding of sanctuary issues**, especially by enabling the voices of people seeking sanctuary to be heard directly through a whole organisational approach to staff awareness-raising about what it means to be seeking sanctuary and providing opportunities for the settled community engaged with your library to also understand the need for a humane asylum process.

4 **A nominated member of staff/team** as a contact point for sanctuary queries/people seeking sanctuary. This should be clearly communicated and be easily accessible and the staff member must be appropriately trained.

5 Wherever possible, **engage people seeking sanctuary in decision-making** processes at all levels and in all activities – including the three-year plan or the embedding into existing plans of how the library service aims to build on the award and continue to develop the culture of welcome.

6 **Create opportunities for relationships of friendship and solidarity** to develop between local people and those seeking sanctuary through active engagement with the wider community, including people seeking sanctuary and the local City of Sanctuary network and/or refugee support network if there is one.

7 **Identify opportunities for practical action** to inform and support communities, and work on common cause issues with communities (particularly through a commitment to ensure information and referral services are equipped to assist people seeking sanctuary and minimising barriers to their accessing your services)

8 **Recognise and encourage partnership-working** and network development across localities through active engagement with the national Libraries of Sanctuary Stream

There is further information about this, including templates for assessment, on the website.

Coventry's Conversation Cafés

Conversation Cafés run at seven libraries across Coventry. These are informal sessions where anyone can come along to practise their spoken English. They are aimed at newly-arrived communities, including people seeking sanctuary and other migrants.

Participants practise their spoken English and support and encourage one another to improve their pronunciation. Library staff welcome everybody and facilitate the sessions. Staff guide participants to ESOL books and bilingual dictionaries, as well as resources on CD to help improve pronunciation. This enables attendees to further their English skills outside of the Conversation Cafés and any formal ESOL classes they may be taking.

Attendees have also been signposted to Coventry City Council Adult Education and WEA ESOL courses for formal classes to improve their English skills.

Library staff have promoted Conversation Cafés to Adult Education teams, which enables them to refer their clients to local Conversation Cafés.

The Conversation Cafés have been successful in engaging new communities to practise their spoken English and participants have gained in confidence as a result. The sessions have introduced participants to the wide variety of library resources on offer to them, including free membership, specialist ESOL collections and the range of free activities across the city. To some participants the concept of a free, open, public library service is a new experience. Participants have gained in confidence and become aware of other opportunities on offer to them, such as formal ESOL classes, volunteering and job opportunities.

A significant outcome from the work is the variety of new partners that are part of the project. These partners include Coventry City Council Migration Team, Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre, The Workers Educational Association, Foleshill Women's Training, as well as partners which are also part of the Migration Network Coventry including Citizens Advice, Coventry Law Centre, Coventry University, Warwick University, West Midlands Police, Coventry Night Shelter, Coventry Migrant Women's House, and the Red Cross.

Central Library Conversation Café participants' written feedback:

'It is very good'

'This helped me speak better English'

'I like this group and I want to keep coming'

'Very good group and I have gained confidence'

'I enjoyed having conversations with other people'

'It's really improved my English skills and information'

What have you gained from this event? 'Making friends'

'Join conversations improved my spoken English and meet different people'

Samira, from Iran, did not have the opportunity to talk to others before joining the Conversation Café. She says she has learnt new words, as well as getting the chance to practise ones she already knows. Meeting people from different countries at the Conversation Cafés has meant she is more familiar with English spoken with different accents, and this has greatly increased her confidence. As she has had such a good experience through attending the Conversation Cafés she felt able to volunteer at the Library, and now also volunteers at a local organisation supporting women. She has also supported new Conversation Café participants, encouraging a friend to also start volunteering at the Library.



Leicester New Walk Museum



Thimblemill Library, Sandwell

Wrexham County Borough Library Service

When the Family Information Service first held information sessions for the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme, the library played an important supporting role in that they held a series of bespoke 'story sessions' for Syrian parents and children. In the early stages the story books were about general life in the UK (eg a child's visit to the dentist or starting school) and the story appeared in the book in both English and Arabic, which was helpful for both parents and children.

The families were also able to borrow these books to help them to familiarise/practise their English at home. Also, an information session was given on library services and several of the parents and children were interested in borrowing mainstream books and/or films to help them with their English. The information sessions were held in a room at the library initially to help people to become familiar with the library, the staff and its services. Wrexham Library still provide summer holiday reading/English activities for children over the summer holidays for the Syrian Resettlement Scheme to help the children to continue to use their English speaking and reading skills during the summer break.

Kent Libraries Registration and Archives

exhibited the 2019 Unaccompanied
Asylum Seeking Children Art Project.

As with many local authorities, Kent
County Council supports unaccompanied
asylum-seeking children and young people.
Some of the Kent young people have
produced art work to show their journeys
and experience of reaching Britain –
the exhibition was launched at Turner
Contemporary with a pop-up display for a
day and is now touring some Kent libraries.
The art work has been really well received
in libraries, comments include:



Kent Libraries - Artwork by Gmalem Goneste

'What amazing pictures, I love them'
Ruby, aged 6

**'Really enjoyed seeing the art
this morning, really cheered up
a Monday morning, the children
should be very proud'**

**'Amazing pictures, I really love them,
it must of [sic] took them ages to do'**
Jess, aged 10

**'Emotionally touching images, it
has reverberated my soul and mind
reflecting the difficulty and perilous
journey undertaken by these kids.
Well done UASCs'**

**'Thank you for your artwork and for
showing us a little bit about your
lives so far. I would like to know
about your lives and your journeys
some more'**

**'Very talented kids.
Very striking/moving display.
Love it!'**

'Very provocative – makes you think'

'Made me cry, that's ART, well done'

Brighton & Hove Libraries: The Network of International Women Brighton

The Network of International Women Brighton provides a platform for women from different cultures and backgrounds to meet, share experience and knowledge and support one another.

Brighton & Hove Libraries have developed their partnership with the group over the past 2.5 years. At the library, the Network meet weekly to sew, make crafts, get information, support and make friends. They also practise their English through conversation and translate for each other if there is a communications barrier. The most successful and impactful activity to date has been the creation of the 'Illuminate Tapestry' where the women explored ideas of identity and belonging. Weekly sewing sessions in the library have enabled women to tell their stories, develop friendships, gain new insights, and enhance a sense of belonging, self-confidence and achievement.

During Refugee Week 2019, the Library Service consulted with customers on the service becoming a Library of Sanctuary – they did this at Refugee Week events at The Dome in the centre of the city, at the Network of International Women's sewing group in the library, and in the foyer of the library to catch all customers.



They explored a number of questions with an interactive display board and through a facilitated workshop with the Network; the questions that were explored were:

What does Sanctuary mean to you?

What would a Library of Sanctuary mean or look like to you?

Do you feel this library offers sanctuary and if so how?

How can we improve?

The workshop finished with the women designing a Library of Sanctuary banner, performances of poetry and songs read by women in the group in their home languages, and a wonderful lunch to which some of the women contributed dishes. The Library banner, which took 3 months to complete, was presented to Brighton & Hove Libraries in December, making a statement to the city that they are working towards becoming a Library of Sanctuary and they want to be welcoming and inclusive to all, particularly people seeking sanctuary.

Quote from a volunteer from the Network of International Women at Jubilee Library in Brighton who is originally from Iraq:

'I was lonely, bored with no friends, no one to talk to. My husband heard from a friend about the International Women's group meeting at the library and his wife met me and took me to the library. The other women ask me - where are you from? I was so happy. I thought no one is interested in me or my country and we talked. I enjoy the group. Then I heard about volunteering at the library. It's so wonderful it helps me to continue with my life and make friends.'

Seeking Sanctuary

The global picture

According to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) in 2019 there were 70.8 million people, roughly the same as the entire population of the UK, currently displaced from their homes. Among them, there are close to 25.9 million refugees and over half of these are under the age of 18. The vast majority are internally displaced within their own countries, or living in neighbouring countries.

At the height of the humanitarian crisis, there were over 1 million people during 2015 who were seeking refuge in Europe with more than a third making the perilous journey across the Mediterranean Sea. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) the number of arrivals in Europe has been decreasingly steadily since 2016, with nearly 125,000 migrants and asylum seekers arriving in Europe. In addition, in 2019 there were 1,246 people who died trying to reach Europe in 2019 (half the numbers of 2018).

As of May 2019, the Refugee Council estimate there were 25,033 asylum applications in the UK. In the previous year, 67% of initial decisions were refused and 4,028 people seeking asylum were removed or departed voluntarily. The UK asylum system is intentionally hostile, with thousands of people waiting months, or even years, for a decision and just 26% of initial applications being granted in 2018. Most people whose initial asylum claim is refused appeal against the decision, and a high number of appeals are successful. In 2016, the courts overturned Home Office decisions in more than 40% of appeal cases, raising huge questions over the initial application process.

Some definitions

Asylum-seeker

This is a person who is in the UK legally, having requested asylum, and who is waiting for the Home Office to make a decision on that application. They may be waiting to receive an initial decision on their claim, or they may have had their claim refused but they are appealing the decision. There is no such thing as an illegal asylum-seeker; everyone has the right to have their claim considered. In the UK the application process is long and complicated, it can take years; many appeals against negative decisions are eventually upheld. Most people in this situation are not allowed to work or claim mainstream benefits, instead they must survive on Home Office support which is around £5 per day.

Refugee

The meaning of the term refugee in international law is someone who, 'owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside of their country of nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail themselves of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside of the country of their former habitual residence is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to return to it.'

Refused asylum-seeker

Someone whose application for asylum has been refused by the Home Office in the country in which they have requested asylum, and who has exhausted all rights of appeal. However, some people cannot be returned to their country of origin, regardless of their refusal, for example because of lack of stability in that country and/or continuing danger, or because that country will not allow them to return.

People Seeking Sanctuary

In this resource pack, we mainly use this term to refer to all refugees, people seeking asylum or others forced to migrate from any background. This is to combat the dehumanising rhetoric which can occur when referring to people by their immigration status.

Stirchley Library, Birmingham as a 'Place of Welcome'

Stirchley Library launched its 'Place of Welcome' sessions in May 2019, becoming the first Birmingham library to get involved with the initiative. This is delivered alongside their weekly Jigsaw Club group. The Jigsaw Club provides a great environment for friendly chat, the chance to participate or just to sit and pass a couple of hours of the day. Everyone is welcome and often people using the library computers or choosing books will offer comment on the jigsaws or enjoy listening to the group chat. Everyone is free to join in if they so choose. The 'Place of Welcome' sessions provide free refreshments for which the Library has successfully fund-raised.

Libraries Connected



Machynlleth Library, Powys

“Machynlleth Library in Powys use the International Migrants Day 18th December as an opportunity to create a display of migrant and refugee related books. They are working with local group Mid Wales Refugee Action to explore ways to welcome people seeking sanctuary”

The library and information Needs of new arrivals

Their key needs include:

A need for information:

for example, a recent research project into the needs of LGBTQ+ African people seeking asylum found that '[...] 15 participants mentioned information as an important support need [...] Most of the discussion of information as a support need involved wanting to know where to go for legal support, or wanting to know more about what is involved in the asylum application process from start to finish, or wishing that from the start they had had a leaflet or booklet listing the charities they could go to for help.' *LGBT African Asylum Seeker Research Project Report*, [↗](#)

Help with finding their way around a new place and signposting to relevant services

Thimblemill Library, Sandwell hosts welfare sessions; one-to-one support sessions on asylum issues; befriending courses; and Bearwood Action for Refugees runs 'Welcome to your area' events.

Specifically, people seeking sanctuary face many barriers in accessing healthcare.

There is some information and also useful links on the BMA website [↗](#) and detailed evidence from Wales see: [↗](#) *The health experiences of asylum seekers and refugees in Wales*,

In this report:

'We identified five themes from our literature search which help or hinder people seeking sanctuary in accessing healthcare. These were: language and communication; cultural understanding and values; the presence or absence of trusting relationships; structural barriers, such as out of pocket expenses; and knowledge of the health system.' [p6]

As well as signposting people to appropriate healthcare agencies,

staff in public libraries can develop awareness of these barriers.



Photo by Mimi Than on Unsplash



Photo by Alvaro Reyes on Unsplash

A need for sympathetic advice and signposting

The Mitchell Library, Glasgow has developed a partnership project between the library service and the Central Citizens Advice Bureau. Library staff, through engagement with homeless people and those in need, are connectors to CAB in-reach workers. Central CAB are located within the library, supporting the Mitchell information offer. Where help is accepted, CAB have found many in need to be asylum-seekers or refugees.

For example: a middle-aged man, who had been here in the UK for around 18 years, for a combination of different reasons, found himself in and out of the asylum system. The CAB in-reach worker was informed by the librarians that he was staying in the library all day, from when it opened in the morning until closing. After a little persuasion from the CAB in-reach service, he did engage and the in-reach worker was able to get him into the male Homeless Assessment Centre. It had been apparent that he had quite severe mental health issues. He had other health issues and had been diagnosed with HIV. From there he was admitted to hospital because of his mental health issues. After leaving hospital, he was given supported accommodation, and the solicitor that the CAB had referred him to continued to work on his case for permanent residency.

In another case, the library staff identified a young Vietnamese woman who was a lone parent with a one-year-old child and expecting a second child. She appeared to be spending quite a lot of her time in the library. After engaging with the in-reach service, it became apparent that she was about to leave her Home Office supported accommodation, where she had stayed whilst seeking asylum. She had just gained refugee status and had been looking for accommodation. She informed the in-reach project worker that she was being placed in a temporary furnished flat, but was unsure how to access the benefit system and did not know what she was entitled to. The project worker successfully assisted her through both the process of opening a bank account and making an application for benefits.

Overcoming Barriers

Some of the main barriers to the take-up of library services by new arrivals – and examples of overcoming them – are:



Abraham Moss Library, Manchester

Personal and social

- **New arrivals' experiences** may make them fear institutions/anything official: you can go some way to overcoming these fears by making the building welcoming and ensuring that all library staff are aware of the issues that new arrivals may have faced and can respond positively to them
- **New arrivals may not have used a library before:** in **Oldham**, new arrivals that engage with Oldham Council's Emerging Communities team are brought to the library for an introduction to the services and support available in the town. They are then given a tour of the library and introduction to what is on offer, and the Library Service has provided dual-language story-times for those who attend with children
- **Cultural barriers** eg level of awareness of libraries and what they do; attitudes of men in some cultures towards women in public places; attitude to queuing. **Aberdeenshire Libraries** offer Bookbug sessions solely for Syrian women – the Bookbug book gifting programme gives every child four free packs of books between birth and primary 1, without any need to register. It also runs free song and rhymes sessions in libraries and community centres across Scotland [↗](#)

Rothsay Library, Argyll & Bute invited female Syrian New Scots to the library to introduce them to the range of services on offer, including Adult Learning

- **Lack of literacy (and IT literacy)** all libraries can help sanctuary-seekers find literacy (and ESOL) classes – and some may have organisations actually running classes in the library
- Many libraries, eg **Newcastle**, offer IT support

- **Lack of spoken English** **Rothsay Library, Argyll & Bute** provided leaflets in Arabic as part of their Macmillan Cancer Information and Support Service; with money from the Libraries: Opportunities for Everyone innovation fund, **East Sussex Libraries** ran dual-language rhyme-time and story-time sessions; the staff observed that children and mothers improved their English language skills; **Manchester** have made the 'Transparent Language' language-learning app available for free through Manchester Libraries membership – this is an online learning package offering more than 100 language courses, with over 90 foreign language courses and more than 25 courses for English learners delivered in their own first language [↗](#)
- **Oldham** have shared their model for English conversation classes with libraries involved with the Greater Manchester Libraries of Sanctuary project. Spin-off activities have started developing, including an Arabic translation service, gardening club, and an ESOL class specifically for new arrivals
- **Health/mental health issues**, all libraries can signpost people to organisations where they can get health and mental health support. The City of Sanctuary Mental Health Resource pack (see Section 6 - Resources) is a brilliant guide for staff and volunteers in developing sensitivity and understanding of the asylum journey
- **Lack of social integration** by being community hubs, libraries are creating places where people have an opportunity to meet others and begin to integrate

- **Lack of experience/knowledge of IT**

Aberdeenshire Libraries were approached by Community Learning and Development about the possibility of a volunteer running some ICT sessions in the library. 'He was appointed in the same way as for any other volunteer, and he ran sessions in Inverurie library on Saturday afternoons. It was a 6-week block for men in the first instance, but the volunteer didn't see a problem in having mixed classes. They asked for stickers on the keyboard for Arabic letters to make the classes easier and help them learn the English letters; however, in the end, the library service provided keyboards with English and Arabic letters on them, and these could be borrowed in the library. The volunteer taught the group how to set up an email address and to shop online as these seem to be the main things they wanted to do. Library staff also provided a digital resources session with the whole group to let them know the resources they can have access to as part of their library membership'

- **Low income and poverty** (eg not having money for bus fares): libraries are trying to keep their charges to a minimum, and can also signpost people to potential bike schemes or sources of money advice

Perception and awareness

- **Libraries are not for us/Libraries do not have anything that we need:** by promoting the services of the library (for example by organising visits/tours, as they do in **Birmingham**, you can ensure that sanctuary-seekers find out more about what libraries really do offer

- **You have to pay to join/use the service:** it is really surprising for lots of people that public libraries are free! Again via outreach talks, tours, meeting sanctuary-seekers to outline what libraries offer, publicity, word-of-mouth, libraries can promote the message that they are free to join and you do not need to pay to use most of the services

- **Lack of confidence to use a library** especially if the person's status is not settled: again, when libraries welcome people and offer real support to sanctuary-seekers, this can go a long way to starting to overcome lack of confidence

Environmental

(where the library is located, how it is laid out)

- **People not knowing where the library is,** or what transport is available to get there, or poor transport links altogether **Brighton & Hove Libraries** work with Voices in Exile who run a Migrant Welcome Project, and they bring groups who are new to the city to the central library where they have a tour of the library, are offered refreshments, and can join the library if they would like to. Having partners bring the group into the library gets them through the door, which is always the first hurdle!

- **Lack of visible welcome:** libraries have overcome this by, for example, prominently displaying welcome posters (perhaps in a range of community languages) and making sure that the entrance to the library is as bright and welcoming as possible; staff also greet visitors to the library and help make them feel comfortable there

- **Not understanding how the library is arranged:** simple, visual plans showing the layout – where different types of library materials and other facilities are – make finding your way around the library much easier as will special guided tours

- **Attitudes of other library users:** this is one of the most difficult barriers to overcome, but many libraries organise events and activities where people can meet and begin to mix socially (and library staff are also clear about their role should something unpleasant be said). Book displays and collections telling the stories of people seeking sanctuary help to raise awareness and empathy



Institutional

- **Joining procedures, including the need for proof of ID and the terminology used on forms** examples include:

Stirchley Library, Birmingham which encourages newly-arrived residents to join the library with the hostel providing a 'parental address';

Brighton & Hove Libraries do not ask for ID to join the library, and, if someone is homeless, they use the library address;

Norfolk Library and Information Service offers membership and access to the libraries' facilities to members of the community who may have difficulty in producing proof of address by offering a 'Lite' membership; people with this level of membership are able to have immediate access to the computers and to borrow books and other materials;

Oldham Libraries have removed the need to show ID

- **Fines and charges:** many libraries, for example **Oldham**, have removed fines
- **Lack of staff awareness and training** eg library staff from across **Greater Manchester** have been trained by Manchester City of Sanctuary in awareness of the issues facing new arrivals
- **Staffing capacity and library opening hours:** as we know, many public libraries have had their funding reduced, so it is difficult to recruit and employ as many staff as they need – as a result, opening hours are sometimes reduced (and, in some cases, libraries have been closed). Within often very limited resources, however, libraries are still finding ways of extending their staffing capacity and their opening hours, often by reaching out into the community
- **Using jargon:** as in all fields, this can be hard to overcome, but libraries are working hard to make the language they use as jargon-free as possible

- **Lack of networking by library staff with organisations supporting new arrivals:** it is vital to make and maintain these contacts in order to keep up-to-date with changes

- **Problems with identifying the language of newly-arrived people** as these can be very diverse and populations can change: liaison and partnership-working with local organisations that support sanctuary-seekers can help to overcome this barrier – and it is important to make contact regularly in order to keep up-to-date with changes in the area

- **Inappropriate staff attitudes and behaviour:** many libraries have organised training courses looking at the needs of sanctuary-seekers, in which the importance of appropriate responses by library staff is stressed. All libraries also have codes of conduct (and Equal Opportunity Policies) which guide their staff

- **Not purchasing material suitable for new arrivals:** once libraries have built up a picture of the needs of their local sanctuary-seekers (especially language needs), they can then plan to purchase material that is available. Many also focus on providing good collections of books and other materials to support ESOL and literacy students, as well as materials that help show how things work in the UK (eg job-seeking)

- **There not being appropriate material available to buy for new arrivals:** this is a difficult issue to resolve, but the developing network via Libraries of Sanctuary will mean that libraries can share information about sources, and also, if required, put joint pressure on publishers to produce more relevant material



Leicester New Walk Museum

SECTION 6

Resources

General guides

The **City of Sanctuary** resources section has a wide range of information, tools and templates available at: [↗](#)

The resource, '**Information for people seeking sanctuary**', would be a valuable website to bookmark (or have as a permanent icon on library computers) [↗](#)

Specifically, you may find their **Mental health resource pack** [↗](#) useful, as well as the other Stream of Sanctuary resource packs, for example *Arts* [↗](#) and *Universities* [↗](#)

In addition, City of Sanctuary have published a book, **A Hundred Thousand Welcomes**, which tells the story of CoS from its beginnings in 2005 to 2018 [↗](#)

Human Rights Watch produces annual reports – the latest is *World Report 2019* – which assesses key human rights issues in more than 90 countries and territories worldwide [↗](#)

The **Migration Observatory** 'informs debates on international migration and public policy' by analysing migration data and providing research and analysis on a variety of migration-related issues [↗](#)

The **Public Health Wales NHS Trust**, Swansea University has published a key guide to the healthcare needs of people seeking sanctuary, *The health experiences of asylum seekers and refugees in Wales* (Public Health Wales (Technical Report of the HEAR Study), 2019) [↗](#)

The 'hostile environment' - There is growing evidence that attitudes towards sanctuary-seekers (and other migrants) have been shaped by political views and actions. See, for example: Frances Webber and Anya Edmond-Pettitt. *The embedding of state hostility: a background paper on the Windrush Scandal*, Institute of Race Relations, 2018, [↗](#)

Erica Consterdine. 'Hostile environment: the UK government's draconian immigration policy explained', *The Conversation*, 26 Apr 2018, [↗](#)

Library-related resources:

The Network-tackling social exclusion website

The main part of the website is arranged into topics: on the 'Migration' topic landing-page, there is: 'Migration: "Welcome To Your Library" and museums, archives, galleries and other cultural and heritage organisations' [↗](#)

- Includes posts on:

- 'How can the cultural sector support refugees and other new arrivals?' Regularly-updated round-up of initiatives in the UK and abroad
- 'How can we find out how many refugees and asylum-seekers there are in our area?'

'Welcome To Your Library' was a national project connecting public libraries with people seeking sanctuary, which ran from 2003-2007. Some of the resources are still relevant, for example:

- Evaluation report, [↗](#)
- Evaluation report – executive summary, [↗](#)
- Pilot project final report, [↗](#)
- In addition, other key documents are still available via The Network website, [↗](#)

John Vincent. *Libraries welcome everyone: six stories of diversity and inclusion from libraries in England* (Arts Council England, 2018), which summarised equality and diversity initiatives taken by public libraries in England, [↗](#)

John Vincent 'Welcoming Refugees to the UK (and to Libraries)', CILIP blogpost, 2015, [↗](#)

Evaluation of the Libraries: Opportunities for Everyone innovation fund: final report (DCMS, 2018), [↗](#)

Here is the link to sign up to the **Libraries and Museums of Sanctuary email group**: [↗](#)

Key organisations

The following is a list of some of the key organisations supporting people seeking sanctuary in the UK.

It is also worth finding out about your local support groups for people seeking sanctuary, who may run their own training sessions.

The British Red Cross supports vulnerable people seeking sanctuary, providing refugee services in 58 towns and cities across the country. [↗](#)

Detention Forum is a network of organisations working together to challenge the UK's use of detention. [↗](#)

RefuAid supports access to language tuition, education, finance and meaningful employment. Their effective model involves partnering with private language schools to help students attain the required level of English and make use of their university offers. [↗](#)

Refugee Action offers help and advice for people seeking sanctuary on issues including the asylum process and how to access support. They also champion some really effective campaigns. [↗](#)

Right to Remain have produced a toolkit which is 'a guide to the UK immigration and asylum system. It gives an overview of the legal system and procedures, with detailed information on rights and options at key stages, and actions you can take in support of your claim, or to help someone else'. [↗](#)

The Refugee Council provides expert support and advocacy to people seeking sanctuary in the UK. [↗](#)

Refugee Support Network provides a range of services which help 15-25 year olds seeking safety in the UK to get into, stay in, and do well in education. This includes educational mentoring, a national helpline offering advice and support for young people who have the academic potential to attend university but who face challenges in doing so because of practical and immigration status-related barriers. They also run training aimed at university staff and student ambassadors. [↗](#)

UNHCR – the United Nations Refugee Agency: 'We strive to ensure that everyone has the right to seek asylum and find safe refuge in another State, with the option to eventually return home, integrate or resettle.' [↗](#)

NATECLA (the National Association for Teaching English and other Community Languages to Adults) have published *A framework for good practice in voluntary ESOL* (NATECLA, 2019) [↗](#)



'A Hundred Thousand Welcomes' is the story of City of Sanctuary from its beginnings in 2005 to 2018, told through a tapestry of personal stories about welcoming refugees. The stories take us into the lives of ordinary people in cities and countryside, schools and universities, churches and mosques, trades unions, libraries, sports clubs, theatres and much more, and shine a spotlight on ways that refugees have found a home and a welcome in these places. An essential and enjoyable read for anyone wanting to learn about the asylum process and be inspired to contribute to building the culture of welcome and inclusion.

You can order your copy from **Lulu Bookshop**: <https://bit.ly/2JckqUN>

Acknowledgements

This resource pack was researched and written by John Vincent.

John has worked in the public sector since the 1960s, primarily in public library services. In 1997, he was part of the team that produced the UK's first review of public libraries and social exclusion (resulting in The Network, which he now coordinates). He is particularly interested in supporting the work that libraries do with people seeking sanctuary, young people in care, and with LGBTQ+ people.

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