"Welcome To Your Library"
A Study of Public Library Services for Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Sheffield and Liverpool

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Abstract

This study is an investigation into public library services for Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Sheffield and Liverpool. These authorities were chosen as they both have established and newly arrived Refugee communities living in the cities.

Liverpool is participating in the second phase of ‘Welcome To Your Library’, a national project funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation to connect public libraries and Refugee communities. Both authorities have dedicated Librarians working to improve their services to this group.

The first part of the study examines the relevant literature including national government documents, local authority plans and policies and previous research into library services for BME communities including Refugees and Asylum Seekers. The literature review aims to set this study in a wider context and provide and outline of current service provision for this group. It also establishes why there is a need for libraries to actively engage with these communities.

The research is divided into two sections. First the information and library needs of this group are identified, through previous research looking at immigrant groups, Roma communities and Refugees and Asylum Seekers. A small focus group was conducted with Refugees and Asylum Seekers belonging to a Conversation group in Sheffield. This revealed that Refugee groups have diverse experiences and needs although a desire for materials in their first language and to help with learning English was expressed. It is clear from the research that language is a major barrier that prevents these groups from engaging fully in society. The library has a role to play in helping them overcome this barrier.

Interviews with non library staff revealed that certain groups would benefit from using libraries. These include destitute Asylum Seekers and unaccompanied minors who are in the care of the local authority until aged 18.

The second part of the study focuses on public library services in Sheffield and Liverpool and what improvements are needed. It is revealed that theauthorities are aware of their needs and are developing new ways to engage with them to meet these needs. Interviews and questionnaire responses from library staff reveal that working in partnership with the organisations in the city that support these communities is the most effective way to do this. It is important to raise the profile of the library service within the wider community and promote relevant services.

One improvement identified from this research is the need for staff training. Frontline staff are the welcoming face of the library and need to be aware of the circumstances experienced by many of these communities. Liverpool have developed a video in collaboration with artists in the city who happen to be Refugees themselves, to raise awareness and challenge common misconceptions of these communities. They will use this for staff training purposes.

Chapter One: Research Context

1.1 Introduction

1.11 Asylum in the UK

The latest Home Office Statistics show the total number of applications for asylum in 2005 was 25, 710, a slight decrease from the previous year. It is estimated that 31% of these applications were granted Refugee status or temporary residency (Home Office Asylum statistics, 2006). Following an unsuccessful application many asylum seekers remain in the UK. Although some appeal against the decision, many are forced to work illegally or face destitution. It is not known how many destitute asylum seekers there are currently in the UK (Refugee Council website, 2007).

Despite the overall decline in official statistics, it remains vitally important that Refugee and Asylum Seeker communities feel included in British society. These communities come to the UK as a last resort often fleeing persecution in their home countries. On arrival they are dispersed throughout the UK and await a decision on their application. They are often sent to areas with cheap housing, high deprivation and unemployment. Often these areas have no history of migrant or immigrant populations which can cause tension and hostility from local communities. This climate is heightened by negative depictions of Asylum Seekers in the media.

Asylum seekers face many barriers when they arrive in the UK, the most significant being language. Recent changes to the cost of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision will only compound the difficulties faced by these communities,

> From 2007/08 asylum seekers aged 19+ will no longer be automatically eligible for publicly funded Further Education provision. Only those who are granted refugee status, humanitarian protection or discretionary leave by the Government will be eligible (Department for Education and Skills website, 2007)

Asylum Seekers are not allowed to work until a decision has been made on their application or if they have waited over 12 months for an initial decision. They currently receive 70% of income support. Many Asylum Seekers rely on support from national and local charities and voluntary organizations.

The extent to which these communities can integrate to feel part of British society will depend on the support they receive and their English language skills.

1.111 Definitions

In the UK, an Asylum Seeker is someone who has registered an asylum claim with the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) at the Home Office and is awaiting a decision (Refugee Council website, 2007)

A Refugee is someone who has had their asylum application accepted by the Home Office. To be granted Refugee status the applicant must meet the criteria set out in the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees. Refugees are granted limited leave to remain for five years. After this time their case is reviewed (Refugee Council website, 2007).

1.12 What can Public Libraries do?

Public libraries are safe, welcoming spaces at the heart of the community. They have a duty to provide accessible and relevant services to all. This inclusive ethos means that libraries are ideally placed to contribute to improving the quality of life of vulnerable or excluded groups such as Asylum Seekers and Refugees and help them to integrate into the existing communities.

1.121 Welcome To Your Library

‘Welcome To Your Library’ (WTYL) is a national project aimed at connecting Refugees and Asylum Seekers with public libraries to nurture learning, well-being and a sense of belonging for all. Through working in partnership with Refugee and Asylum Seeker communities and support organisations, the project aims to

develop relevant and accessible services and collections (Welcome To Your Library website, 2007).

WTYL was successfully piloted during 2003-2004 in five London boroughs, Brent, Camden, Enfield, Merton and Newham. In 2005 the project was extended to include a further five authorities, the London boroughs of Hillingdon and Southwark, Leicester, Tyne and Wear (a consortium of councils in Newcastle, Gateshead, Tyneside and Sunderland) and Liverpool. The project will undergo an evaluation at the end of 2007 by which time it is hoped that services for Refugees and Asylum seekers will be integral to library policy.

1.13 Sheffield

Sheffield is a diverse city with a sizeable ethnic minority population that rose by 80% between 1991 and 2001. It has established Black Caribbean and African communities and Asian populations (Sheffield City Council, 2003). The city has also seen a rise in Eastern European Economic Migrants in recent years. Refugees and Asylum Seekers are also a growing population in the city.

In 2005 the Sheffield Libraries, Archives and Information underwent a major restructuring and an Equality and Diversity Strategy Group was established as well as a Social Inclusion Group. The role of Community Development Librarian for Refugees and Asylum Seekers was also created at this time.

1.14 Liverpool

Being a port city Liverpool has a history of migration and immigration with many different communities settling there. Current statistics show the city's BME population to be 5.7% with 95% of the total population born in the UK.

Since 2001 Liverpool has been a dispersal city for the temporary settlement of Asylum Seekers. This is set to continue with increasing numbers of people being housed there (Liverpool Libraries, 2006: 2).

Similar to Sheffield, in 2005 Liverpool Libraries underwent a major restructuring and the roles of Citizenship and Equality Officer and Lifelong Learning Manager were created. These are part of the Learning and Social Inclusion Team.

In 2005/2006 Liverpool became part of the second phase of the 'Welcome To Your Library' project. Before the project their services in this area were limited although they were taking steps to amend this. With the increasing numbers of Asylum Seekers arriving in the city and Refugees settling there it is a much needed area for development.

1.2 Research Aims

The aim of this investigation is to examine public library services for Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Sheffield and Liverpool. Although not a comparative study, inevitably some comparisons will be drawn during the analysis and discussion of the findings. It was thought that examining an authority that is part of WTYL and one that is not connected to a project may provide interesting results.

The ultimate aim of this research is to provide further information about the state of UK public library services for this community and to identify areas for improvement and that require further research.

1.3 Research Objectives

1. To establish the library and information needs of Refugees and Asylum Seekers.

2. To establish the barriers that prevent these groups from using the service.

3. To investigate the current provision of library services to Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Sheffield.

- Identify what services are available
- Identify how these services are developed (for example community consultation)
- Identify areas for improvement

4. To investigate the current provision of library services for Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Liverpool.
   - Identify what services are available
   - Identify how these services are developed
   - Identify areas for improvement

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction and Purpose

This chapter will outline the key issues and themes relating to public libraries and the provision of services to Refugees and Asylum Seekers. A broad range of literature has been examined including government policy documents and websites, Public Library Strategic and Service Delivery plans and research related to the public library and the social inclusion agenda.

The purpose of this literature review is to place this study in context by providing the reader with an overview of current public library service provision for Refugees and Asylum Seekers.

2.2 Social Exclusion and Social Inclusion

Following the election of New Labour in 1997, social exclusion and how to tackle it was at the forefront of British politics. The Social Exclusion Unit was established in the same year to find "joined-up solutions to joined-up problems" through policy and research. This was replaced by the Social Exclusion Task Force in 2006. Social exclusion can be defined in the following terms,

> Social exclusion is about more than income poverty. It is a short–hand term for what can happen when people or areas have a combination of linked problems, such as unemployment, discrimination, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime and family breakdown. These problems are linked and mutually reinforcing (Social Exclusion Task Force website, 2007).

The groups most likely to be affected include the homeless, people with mental or physical disabilities, the infirm, people from BME groups including Refugees and Asylum Seekers, the unemployed, people living in isolated rural or inner city areas and people with low literacy levels.

The Social Inclusion Agenda focuses on achieving social justice where all members of society have equal access to public services. The emphasis is on identifying and overcoming the barriers experienced by socially excluded groups.

2.3 The Public Library and Social Inclusion

In light of the government's social inclusion agenda, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) published *Libraries for All: Social Inclusion in Public Libraries*. This report acknowledged the position libraries hold in society recognising their potential to facilitate social change (1999: 7).

The report identifies four categories of barrier preventing vulnerable or excluded groups from using the library they are Institutional, Personal and Social, Perception and Awareness and Environmental. These barriers are complex and are not easily overcome (1999: 12).

2.31 Engaging with the Community

Much of the research reviewed suggests that consultation with the community should be a priority when developing services. It is particularly important to engage with excluded or vulnerable groups in order to ascertain their needs and develop services accordingly. Through their involvement at each stage of the process, "planning, introducing and monitoring the service", these groups will be encouraged to use the library feeling it has something to offer them (DCMS, 1999: 14).

The need for libraries to engage with the local community is evident from research into the provision of services for ethnic minority users. Clough and Quarmby looked at a variety of ethnic minority communities living in Britain in the 1970's. They found that provision of stock for adult users was "inadequate" (1978: 285). This was due to the difficulty in finding appropriate resources and a lack of awareness and knowledge of the local community.

Although this research is dated it does illustrate the need to consult with different groups to find out what they want from their library service. This is reinforced by Roach and Morrison in their study of library services in multicultural Britain. They argue that increased partnership with ethnic minority organizations is vital to understanding the needs of the community and providing an effective service (1999: 112).

Outreach is a vital part of the library's work. By taking services into the community it extends the service, raises the library's profile and expands its user base. In a survey examining public library services for Refugees and Asylum Seekers the majority of authorities who responded said they did provide some form of outreach service. These ranged from visiting Refugee groups, ESOL and literacy classes to liaising with group leaders and conducting library visits and tours (Ryder, 2002: 15).

Libraries For All, refers to the success of Islington Library Service in engaging with ethnic minority groups,

> Outreach librarians talk to the groups to ascertain their library and information needs, and involve them in the selection and acquisition of materials…The outreach librarians have a regular visit programme…to provide ongoing support and review needs, and the head of the library service has a twice-yearly consultation meeting with representatives from the black and other ethnic minority communities (1999: 15).

However, forming links with the community and planning effective outreach activities can be a long process that requires the investment of staff time, which is not always possible (Ryder, 2002: 15).

From surveying the literature it is clear that one area lacking in research is the differing needs of Refugees and Asylum Seekers. New arrivals will have very specific needs, likely to include wanting information about the area they have been housed, information about ESOL classes and where to go for emergency healthcare. Established communities who have leave to remain may want

employment, education and training information, to needs than more settled communities that will change as their circumstances change.

2.32 Multi-agency/Partnership working

The recent government report *Reaching Out: An Action Plan on Social Exclusion* outlines current practices employed to combat social exclusion. It calls for a multi-agency approach where local service providers and agencies work together to meet the needs of excluded groups (2006: 22). The idea of agencies working in partnership is a feature of *Libraries For All: Social Inclusion in Public Libraries*, published in 1999. It suggests that public libraries can be a "key partner in a consortium of learning networks" (1999: 18) and advised forming links with other learning organisations, ranging from schools to adult education providers in order to extend services to the whole community.

Research into public library services for minority groups has revealed this to be one of the most effective ways of developing services. A survey examining public library services for Refugees and Asylum Seekers, revealed that some library authorities do successfully work in partnership with other service providers, such as the City Council Asylum Support Team, social services, housing providers and national organizations such as Refugee Action (Ryder, 2002: 20). However this is not consistent and there remains a need for better communication between libraries and other agencies.

Raddon and Smith in their research into the information needs of Refugee groups highlighted this lack of communication between voluntary sector organizations and statutory agencies. They found that Refugees have needs that relate to a range of government agencies and voluntary organizations for which information is a "running…continuous thread" (1998:3). It makes sense therefore that these agencies should work together and share information to collectively meet the needs of this group. A meeting held by the London Libraries Development Agency (LLDA) to discuss the Welcome To Your Library project,

noted the importance of networking with agencies already working with Refugees. As identified in the previous section, it takes time and resources to build a relationship of trust with community groups, particularly those who are excluded. Therefore, it is vital for libraries to work with agencies who have already established trust (2005: 5).

2.33 Community Cohesion

Libraries embody community values providing welcoming and neutral spaces for all. They need to be resources for the whole community where anyone can go to access the information they require. Libraries have a key role to play in supporting and uniting disparate communities by challenging ignorance and celebrating diversity.

The stock and services in the library should reflect the community in order to foster a sense of ownership and belonging. For example they need to provide information about citizenship and resources for ESOL in order for new arrivals to successfully integrate into the existing community. Evidence suggests that many library authorities do stock resources in a range of community languages, however they report a "difficulty in matching supply and demand" (Ryder, 2002:22). These comments by Glasgow libraries reveal there are issues concerning where and what to purchase,

> Aside from the problems of access to funding, many of these languages are difficult to source for loan or purchase, even before any questions on the quality and range of materials can be considered (Ryder, 2002: 20).

This suggests improved guidance is needed on stock selection but more significantly indicates that there is a lack of quality community language materials actually being published. More research is needed in this area.

Libraries need to simultaneously celebrate difference and promote a sense of community. One way in which libraries can do this is through hosting events that celebrate community diversity. In the 'Words Without Frontiers' survey many library authorities said they hosted or took part in such events, ranging from

displays showing work by Refugee and Asylum Seeker children to dual language poetry and music evenings and local history projects (Ryder, 2002: 20). Hosting these events brings these communities into the library where they will be exposed to the range of stock and services on offer and be encouraged to join. These events are open to all however they must be promoted as such in order for a mix of communities to attend.

In the context of Refugees and Asylum Seekers and increasingly Economic Migrants, it is important that libraries challenge myths and misconceptions often reported by the media. An article published on the Refugee Council website in June 2006 comments on a report by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) that warns against negative portrayals of Refugee groups in the media. The article notes,

> Although significant progress has been made in the UK since the 2005 general elections to reduce negative coverage…some news outlets continue to report in a hostile way, promoting two main perceptions that corrode public and governmental support for refugees – that refugees abuse the hospitality of their hosts and that there are too many asylum seekers in Europe, with more on the way (Refugee Council website, 2007)

A search of tabloid newspaper headlines reveals the extent of this problem, for example from the *Daily Mail* “Terror suspect held over ricin plot can make asylum claim”, “Homeowners taxed £10 more for child asylum seekers” (Daily Mail Online, 2007) and from *The Sun* “Shift ’em” referring to failed asylum seekers and “Asylum Afghans two bins laden” referring to two men from Afghanistan who were found in wheelie bins (The Sun Online, 2007). Often distorting facts and figures, these attention grabbing headlines play on fears, such as linking Asylum with terrorism, and reinforce existing prejudices.

The UNHCR report attributes “adverse or inaccurate media coverage of asylum and immigration” to the “complexity of the issues and the terminology…and the media’s failure to check the facts” (UNHCR, 2006: 16).

With their neutral position, Libraries are ideally placed to challenge misconceptions of asylum. They need to ensure their stock balances negative portrayals with positive ones, for example depicting the economic and cultural contribution Refugees and Asylum Seekers make to society. Libraries can also play a more proactive role by organizing or hosting community meetings as many have rooms or spaces available, where issues such as Asylum can be openly discussed.

2.34 Staff Training

Staff training in diversity and cultural awareness is fundamental to ensuring an inclusive library service however there are no national standards for these areas. It is clear that many frontline staff, essentially the face of the library service, feel they lack the knowledge and skills to deal with groups such as Refugees and Asylum Seekers in an effective way. During a meeting to discuss how to maximize the impact of WTYL, it was suggested that front line staff have been "undernourished" for too long and that investing in staff training, particularly for those on the front line is key to improving the service (LLDA, 2006: 5).

Another point raised was the difference between authorities in their attitudes towards staff training. "Some authorities carry out very little staff training, others think it's very important" (LLDA, 2006: 5). One authority that has recognized its importance is Nottingham City Libraries, who introduced specific training sessions for working with Refugees and Asylum Seekers in 2004. The sessions were run in partnership with the Education and Asylum Support Team as well as Connexions and Refugee Action. They included raising awareness of the issues affecting Refugees and Asylum Seekers and building staff confidence to work with these communities. Overall the training was "well received and had a positive impact on staff attitudes and confidence" (Nottingham City Council, 2006: 26). However, research by the Network has shown that this is not typical of many authorities, when asked about staff training 30 of the 50 respondents admitted they offered no training in this area (2002: 21). Although this research

was conducted five years ago and the situation may have changed, particularly with the impact of the 'Welcome To Your Library' project. This requires further research.

Though nurturing both formal and informal learning, providing accessible and relevant resources that reflect the needs of the community and reaching out to vulnerable or excluded groups the public library promotes community values. Libraries can help regeneration. Knowledge equals power. Through providing relevant and accessible information libraries can empower communities.

2.35 Internet Access and Digital Citizenship

Framework for the Future draws attention to the importance of 'digital citizenship' and the need to counter the growing 'digital divide'. Providing free internet access through The People's Network is one way in which library services are reaching out to excluded groups by allowing those without access to an internet connection at home or work to "experience the opportunities and benefits offered by online services" (Framework for the Future, 2003: 35). The report refers to an example from Leeds libraries where communities are building their own websites with information on local issues. This it argues "increases democratic engagement" as well as developing ICT skills (2003: 34).

> Public library authorities and other local agencies have crucial roles to play in exploiting the new technologies to generate social cohesion, community involvement and participation" (Libraries For All, 1999: 11).

The People's Network plays a significant role in bringing non traditional users into the library. IT and internet access is particularly important to newly arrived communities and can help them to become part of the local community. An investigation into the information needs and information seeking behaviour of Sudanese immigrants in Ontario, Canada, revealed the internet to be their primary source for information. It was particularly important when accessing information about the local community and civic responsibility (Silvio, 2006: 264). The use of email to keep in contact with family and friends in the home country

was also a key finding. This ensures that their sense of identity and connection to their home country is maintained. There is a need for ongoing research and evaluation in this area.

2.36 Sharing Best Practice

There appears to be a general reluctance for library authorities to share information about their experiences of working with vulnerable or excluded groups. They have tended to focus on “practical getting on and doing” in favour of evaluating and reflecting (LLDA, 2006: 9).

In a meeting for the WTYL project, a representative from the Paul Hamlyn foundation pointed out that although “there are pockets of good practice and some exceptional work” information is not being disseminated effectively, in order for other authorities to benefit (LLDA, 2006: 8). Some authorities have shared information, for example Nottingham City Libraries consulted Kent County Council as they had greater experience of dealing with Refugee and Asylum Seeker communities although these are usually one off instances (Ryder, 2002:30).

The need to share information was also identified in the ‘Words Without Frontiers’ research as this response from a librarian in North Tyneside illustrates,

> There was no national network or central point which we could approach to find out ‘good practice’ in other authorities. We ended up ringing up obvious sources (eg Refugee Council) before getting the confidence to go ahead and do something. It took a considerable amount of time to get anywhere
>
> (Ryder, 2002: 40)

The importance of partnership working is emphasized here but also the need for a national resource that documents everything that has been done, if it worked and what could be improved.

The ‘Welcome To Your Library’ website discussed in further in Chapter 6, is a repository for reports, policy documents and plans related to this subject that is accessible to everyone. The website has a discussion board open to both library and non-library staff wanting to share ‘best practice’ or simply find out more about how to engage with these groups.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Approach

This research took an inductive approach using qualitative research methods. Primarily data was collected through telephone and face to face interviews with questionnaires and a focus group used to gather supplementary information. Using a combination of methods to collect information,

> the researcher is able to address different aspects of the same research question thereby extending the breadth of the project (Gorman & Clayton, 1997:32).

This approach, referred to as triangulation, enriches the quality of the research attempting to address the weaknesses in the different research methods.

The research for this project was divided into two areas, firstly to establish the library and information needs of refugees and asylum seekers and secondly to investigate the library services provided by Sheffield and Liverpool.

Key contacts in Sheffield and Liverpool were identified through consultation with the research supervisor and the 'Welcome To Your Library' (WTYL) project coordinator. In Sheffield this was the Community Development Librarian responsible for delivery of services to Refugees and Asylum Seekers and in Liverpool two members of staff responsible for the Welcome To Your Library project, the Citizenship and Equality Officer and the Life Long Learning Manager.

3.2 Data Collection Methods

In order to examine library services for Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Sheffield and Liverpool, it was necessary to determine the information and library needs of these groups. This was done through examining the literature, interviewing professionals working with Refugee groups and conducting an informal focus group with people from these communities.

3.21 Focus Group

In the initial proposal for this research, it was intended that focus groups be used in conjunction with a questionnaire to collect data about the information and library needs of Refugees and Asylum Seekers. Following initial contact with an organization in Sheffield which runs various support groups for these communities, it became clear that questionnaires would not be an effective method to use partly due to extra support needed to help with language difficulties. It was therefore decided that informal focus groups would be the best method of data collection.

Participating in focus groups can be less intimidating than formal interviews as they provide a supportive environment in which to share opinions and experiences. Focus groups can also provide richer and more varied results as they give the opportunity to observe the participants interacting and gauge similarities and differences in opinion (Morgan, 1997: 10). Initially two focus groups were to be conducted, one in Sheffield and one in Liverpool. However, due to time pressures and a lack of response from appropriate organizations, one in Sheffield was conducted.

The focus group took place during a conversation group session for Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Sheffield. Being amongst familiar people and surroundings created an informal atmosphere where participants felt comfortable contributing their ideas. The group leader was also present to help with any language difficulties.

The participants were chosen using opportunistic sampling, as it was not known who would be present prior to the session. 6 people agreed to participate in the focus group, 2 males and 4 females. Consultation with the participants at the beginning of the session determined how long it would run for and whether breaks would be needed for refreshments. The group ran for approximately 20 minutes without a break, although refreshments were available throughout.

3.22 Questionnaires

Questionnaires were used to collect qualitative data about library services in Sheffield and Liverpool. Data from the questionnaires was intended to supplement information gathered from the interviews. Consultation with the Community Development Librarian in Sheffield and the Citizenship and Equality Officer in Liverpool, determined which members of staff to target.

In Liverpool, questionnaires were sent to 4 Library Managers. 2 where the Welcome To Your Library project is based and 2 who have peripheral involvement with the project.

In Sheffield, 4 Library managers were sent questionnaires.

Two questionnaires were designed each tailored to a specific authority (see appendix 1). Both questionnaires comprised 14 questions ranging from the general to the specific. Open ended questions were used to draw out as much information as possible.

The response rate was very good for Sheffield with 4 Managers returning completed questionnaires. For Liverpool only 2 were returned.

3.23 Interviews

To ensure the reliability and validity of the data collected, interview questions were non-directive with the researcher taking on a supportive and non-judgmental role. As far as possible, open-ended and neutral questions were used to encourage participants to impart further information (Gorman & Clayton, 1997: 129).

3.231 Interviews with Organizations Supporting Refugees and Asylum Seekers

In order to gain an insight into the library and information needs of asylum seekers and refugees, interviews were conducted with representatives from organizations working with and supporting these communities.

Interviews can produce a wealth of information with open-ended questions often leading to “unexpected insights” (Gorman & Clayton, 1997: 124). They enable both parties to discuss and clarify the meaning of questions and therefore produce more relevant and quality results (Gorman & Clayton, 1997: 124). The interviews were unstructured with the intention of drawing out as much relevant information as possible. An interview guide covering important issues such as background information about the organization and client needs, were prepared in advance, although the exact wording of questions was spontaneous on the day. This interactive and flexible approach allowed the researcher to instantly respond to information given by the interviewee and encourage them to elaborate further (Gorman & Clayton, 1997: 126).

3.232 Refugee Charities

The initial proposal for this project identified the Refugee Council and Refugee Action as possible organizations to interview. However, increasing pressures on staff time and resources meant they were unable to assist with student research projects.

Contact was then made via email with a regional based charity. In Liverpool, Asylum Link Merseyside, a charity supporting refugees and asylum seekers’ fundamental needs was contacted via email and a telephone interview was set up with one of the managers. The interview lasted approximately 25 minutes and covered the main areas of investigation with additional information drawn from further questioning.

3.233 Connexions Team Manager

Contact was made with the British Minority Ethnic/New Deal for the Community, BME/NDC, Team Manager from Connexions in Nottingham and a face to face interview arranged to take place at her office. She was identified through the researcher's personal contacts.

Conducting a face to face interview allowed the researcher to build up a rapport with the interviewee and to observe non-verbal as well as verbal communication. The interview lasted approximately 30 minutes and consisted of 12 questions, ranging from the young people's needs to the organization's involvement with the library service.

3.234 Interviews with Library Authorities

3.2341 Sheffield

In Sheffield the Community Development Librarian responsible for services to Refugees and Asylum Seekers was contacted via email and arrangements were made to conduct an interview at her place of work, Darnall community library in Sheffield. The interview lasted approximately 45 minutes and was unstructured, although the researcher had prepared a set of issues on which to base the discussion. Questions covered three main areas; current library services, community consultation and partnership working and improvements.

3.2342 Liverpool

In Liverpool the key contacts for the 'Welcome To Your Library' project are the Citizenship and Equality Officer and the Life Long Learning Manager.

The Citizenship and Equality Officer was contacted through email and a face-to-face interview was arranged with herself and the Lifelong Learning Manager. The interview took place in a community library in Liverpool, where the Lifelong Learning Manager worked. The interview lasted approximately 1 hour and 10

minutes. Again it was unstructured with the researcher working from a guide detailing the issues to be covered. Questions covered the same three areas as Sheffield however; modifications were made to include reference to the 'Welcome To Your Library' project.

3.235 Interview with Welcome To Your Library Project Co-ordinator

The Project Co-ordinator was identified through consultation with the research supervisor and contact was established early on in the research process. A telephone interview was arranged due to location and time pressures. This interview took place towards the end of the research process after collecting all other data. This ensured that the questions had a specific focus on the future of the project and library services to Refugees and Asylum Seekers in general. The interview lasted approximately 50 minutes.

3.3 Ethics

The research has ethical approval. Participants were made fully aware of the purpose of the research. They all received information sheets ensuring confidentiality and anonymity where appropriate. Confidentiality was ensured through storing the data in secure files protected by a password. All personal data was destroyed. Data was anonymised as far as possible.

Contact details for the researcher, supervisor and the university administrator were provided on the information sheet, should any participant wish to withdraw or make a complaint.

Any sensitive information revealed during the focus group with Refugees was treated confidentially. The group leader was present in order to deal with any distress caused by the questions.

3.4 Limitations and problems encountered

Conducting research into the needs of Refugees and Asylum Seekers is difficult for a variety of reasons. Namely ‘they’ are not a homogenous group that are easily identifiable. Also there are issues of trust and difficulties in communication.

As previously mentioned it would have been beneficial to have input from a recognized national Refugee Organisation and every effort was made to achieve this however, understandably pressures on their time meant that this was not possible.

Collecting data for this research should have taken place earlier in order for there to be adequate time for analysis and writing up results. However, this was partly due to unforeseen circumstances (Sheffield floods and staff annual leave).

Due to interviews being conducted face to face they are susceptible to bias (Brenner, 1985 :4). Every effort was made so that the questions were open ended and non directive therefore lessening the risk of bias.

Chapter 4: Presentation and Discussion of Results I

4.1 The Information Needs of Refugees and Asylum Seekers and Barriers that prevent them from using the Library

4.11 Introduction to the results

The results for this section were gathered from surveying the literature, a small focus group with Refugees and Asylum Seekers and interviews with 2 members of staff from specific non-library organizations working with Refugee and Asylum Seeker groups.

In order to assess public library services to Refugees and Asylum Seekers it is important to understand their information and library needs and what barriers are preventing them from using the Library.

The following objectives will be explored in this chapter;

1. To establish the information and library needs of Refugees and Asylum Seekers

2. To establish the barriers that prevent Refugees and Asylum Seekers from using the library

4.2 Literature Review

There has been limited research into the information and library needs of Refugees and Asylum Seekers. What studies there are have tended to concentrate on library authorities and the services they offer as opposed to questioning these communities themselves.

This review will examine a range of research in order to outline the information and library needs of Refugees and Asylum Seekers and the personal and external barriers that may prevent them from using library services.

A study by Raddon, previously referred to in Chapter 2, examined the provision of services to Refugees and Asylum Seekers in voluntary organizations and local authorities throughout the UK. Two categories of information needs were identified, primary, including housing, health, welfare and benefits and secondary, including information about education and training courses, ESOL classes and the local community. The information needs that ranked highest in both local authorities and voluntary organizations were as follows;

- Legal Rights, including advice on Asylum
- Housing & Welfare, including advice about benefits
- Education & Training
- Employment
- English Language Classes

Other information considered important was community and cultural support including how to deal with racial harassment, leisure activities, translated material and counseling. Many Refugees and Asylum Seekers experience persecution and torture in their home countries that can lead to mental health issues, therefore providing information about counseling and other health related services is important.

A study of Sudanese immigrants in Ontario, Canada identifies five similar categories of information needs, these are;

- Political
- Employment
- Health

- Education
- Information about how to deal with racism

The information they require ranges from how to get academic scholarships and information about continuing education and training to where to report racist incidents and find out about voting rights (Silvio, 2006: 264). These needs are diverse reflecting a range of skills and abilities.

In a study of the library needs of the Romany minority in Croatia, information about education was found to be the primary need. Similar to Refugees and Asylum Seekers, many Roma communities lack a "permanent connection to a specific place" and face similar barriers such as poverty, low social status and often low levels of education (2004: 359). Education is linked to improving employment opportunities, reducing poverty and raising social status, which are all fundamental to successful integration. As well as education, information about citizenship and social welfare was also found to be important (2004: 360).

Although this study looked at Roma communities, parallels can be drawn with other minority communities. However, due to the nomadic nature of Roma, many will not have been formally educated, therefore the need for education will be a priority.

These studies highlight the role of the library in supporting these communities,

> Libraries go arm in arm with education…improve reading skills and education in general…and assist in the complex and difficult process of…social integration (2004: 360).

However, research suggests that libraries are not well used by these groups as they prefer more "informal" methods of seeking information. Some cultures have strong oral traditions where information is disseminated through word of mouth and personal contact with relatives and friends. This may be due to issues of trust. It is important that these cultural traditions are acknowledged and protected

while at the same time ensuring information is accessible in other formats (Raddon, 1998: 21).

As discussed in chapter 2 there are four types of barrier preventing vulnerable or excluded groups from using the library; institutional, personal and social, perception and awareness and environmental (*Libraries For All*, 1999: 12).

Refugees and Asylum Seekers face many barriers when they arrive in a new country, the most obvious being language. This can affect how successful they are in rebuilding their lives and becoming part of the existing community. Being able to access materials in their first language as well as English is important. As Raddon suggests,

> Language…relates to the sense of belonging…key to those who have been displaced emotionally or physically (1998: 21)

Language can provide continuity in uncertain times. In contrast, the English language can be perceived in a negative way. For some it will have connotations of colonial power, which may cause lack of trust. Lack of confidence may prevent someone from using the library as they may feel embarrassed about speaking English.

Over complicated joining procedures where authorities ask for 2 forms of identification can be another barrier to Refugees and Asylum Seekers, particularly for those at the beginning of the Asylum process. Research suggests that many authorities have changed their joining policies to become more flexible about what identification is accepted. For example Hertfordshire have adapted their membership procedures following consultation with Refugee organizations. In other authorities people with no fixed address are not prevented from borrowing library resources (Ryder, 2002: 13).

Language and joining procedures are not the only barriers preventing Refugees and Asylum Seekers from using libraries. Others include distrust of authority,

particularly if linked to government, no experience of using a library therefore no idea what to expect, negative staff attitudes, out of date or irrelevant stock and overdue fines or borrower charges.

4.3 Focus Group with Refugees and Asylum Seekers

A small focus group was conducted with 6 Refugees and Asylum Seekers belonging to a Conversation Group in Sheffield. The discussion focused on 3 questions with the aim of establishing the participant's awareness of library services, their information and library needs and their suggestions to improve the service.

There are obvious challenges in conducting research with Refugees and Asylum Seekers namely the issue of language. However this group had a very high standard of English and the group leader was present to help with any difficulties when they arose.

The results were digitally recorded and transcribed and analysed using the content analysis method. The results are presented in three sections corresponding to the questions. To distinguish them from the main text the participant's comments are in italics.

All participants had previously used a library in Sheffield or in another city in the UK.

4.31 Awareness of the library

The participants were asked to describe a time that they visited a library and what they did when they were there. Some participants listed every resource and service available and 1 participant commented on the library staff. The responses are below.

“borrowed a book about UK ” *“read newspaper”* *“friendly people”*

“somewhere to sit and read” *“looked at picture books with my children”*

“I took my daughter. She wanted a book about fish, she loves fish. We found one with lots of pictures in”

“I typed a letter and printed it off”

The comments suggest that the participants are aware of the range of services available in the library, although one of them commented on using a computer none mentioned using the internet. Two commented on using the library with their children, but did not state they used the library for themselves.

4.32 Information and Library Needs

The participants were asked to say what they wanted to do in the library. The responses ranged from improving English language skills to meeting friends.

“I want to improve my English and I can practice on the staff”

“I want to find job” *“help my children with their schoolwork”*

“borrow a dictionary so I can understand more”

“meet more people like me. I have a young child and I get bored on my own”

“use computer to keep in touch with family back home. I don’t know how”

“I want the driving theory test in my own language. They said they had one but I had to wait”

The responses to this question highlight the range of services that the participants want to use, computers, children’s library and resources for learning or improving English. It also emphasizes the desire for social interaction as the respondent wants to practice his English and the mother wants to meet other mothers.

4.33 Improvements to the Service

The respondents were asked to say how they thought the library could be improved. 4 respondents commented on improving resources and services. 3 mentioned the library environment and staff.

"English classes, the library's really close for me but I have to travel a long way to get to college"

"more books in my language" *"more information about UK"*

"somewhere to listen to music" *"more dictionaries in more languages"*

"the walls could be painted and more pictures"

"staff are very nice but there could be more of them"

One respondent commented on the signs inside the library, he said

"I use the library many times but someone going in for the first time…it's confusing, you don't know where to go"

All these comments are revealing and indicate that accessing information and resources in their own languages as well as in English is important. The final comment is significant as it shows the importance of clear signage in ensuring that communities feel welcome and are able to navigate the library building easily. One solution for this is to have frequent library tours, perhaps for new users when they join.

4.34 Summary

This small scale focus group was conducted with 6 members of a Refugee and Asylum Seeker Conversation group in Sheffield. The results are intended to complement the findings from the literature review and interviews with staff from organizations working with Refugees.

Although these findings cannot be generalized to all Refugees and Asylum Seekers, they provide valuable insights into how libraries are being perceived and used by this group. Inevitably there are problems with this research and further more in depth questions need to be asked to ensure that libraries are providing the best possible service to these communities.

4.4 Interviews

Interviews were conducted with 2 members of staff from organizations that work with and support Refugees and Asylum Seekers. The first interviewee was the BME/NDC Team Manager from Connexions in Nottingham, who works with teenage Asylum Seekers, the majority of whom are unaccompanied minors. The second interviewee was a representative from a charity in Liverpool called Asylum Link Merseyside who support the day to day needs of Refugees and Asylum Seekers in the city.

Data was recorded digitally and transcribed. It was analysed using content analysis methods and coding was used to highlight important themes.

4.41 BME/NDC Team Manager Connexions

The first question covered background information about the organization, the role of the BME/NDC Team Manager and the profile of young people.

Connexions is a government organization providing support to young people aged between 13 and 19 in England. It offers information and advice on education, training, employment, benefit entitlements, housing, health and relationships (Connexions website, 2007).

The BME/NDC Team Manager works with other organizations in the city to provide support to young people from ethnic minorities including Refugees and Asylum Seekers. The Asylum Seekers are referred to Connexions by Social

Services. The majority of them are unaccompanied minors between 15 and 17 years old that have been granted exceptional leave to remain until their 18th birthday when their cases will be reviewed. Her role is to support the educational needs of the young men and women and remove any barriers preventing their personal and professional development.

4.42 Interview

The interview was unstructured although a list of issues to cover was prepared in advance. The wording of the questions was developed as the interview progressed.

The results have been divided into two categories;

- the needs of the young people and barriers they face
- the role of the library service

Quotations from the interview are in italics and indented to distinguish them from the main text.

4.421 The information and guidance needs of young people and the barriers that they face

The Refugees and Asylum Seekers referred to Connexions come from a variety of countries, speak a range of different languages and have varying skills and abilities. Their needs are as diverse as they are.

It was revealed that language support is one of the most crucial needs for these young people as their English is often limited.

> *"Quite often they're not ready for work because they don't have enough English"*

Closely linked to language needs, the young people also have general educational and personal needs. ESOL classes have traditionally been aimed at adults and are not really suitable for children. Another issue is that young people must be in full time education in order to receive income support and ESOL courses tend to be under 16 hours per week. Therefore Connexions developed their own courses in partnership with local FE colleges that are tailored to meet the needs of the young people they deal with.

> *"ESOL was mainly for adults. In order to get their income support they have to be in full time education which is 16 hours plus. So that provision that was originally there wasn't enough…there are now 3 courses running that cater for varying Refugee and Asylum Seeker clients"*

They also offer different levels of support. One of the courses *"Integrate"* provides both pastoral and educational support to youngsters with high level needs.

> *"So there's the course called 'Integrate'…that course is ESOL but it's also citizenship, PSHE Personal, Social and Health Education, they do trips, they do a bit of maths and IT"*

> *"many of the young people have got very high level needs so they might have one or two children, they might be suffering from trauma or ill health, some of them are pregnant, some of them can't read or write their own language"*

The course acts as a bridge to further education. This year out of the 32 young people attending the course 16 are moving on to pursue further education courses.

"It kind of gives them a kick start if you like, a bridge to get into courses like Plumbing, Social Care, Sports and Leisure like any other British person might"

The second course is for young people who have a degree of education and want to improve their English skills but without the extra support.

"the other course… that's mainly just an ESOL course, so it's for young people who have had some schooling and need to learn English. They go there and learn English and get qualifications but they don't get the levels of support in terms of the pastoral side of things"

The third course is called "English for further study" which is for pre-16 year olds who cannot cope in mainstream school due to language difficulties.

"it's for young people who have been put into normal schools and what was happening was they were…sitting at the back being disruptive because they couldn't understand anything"

"it's a bit like an international school, all the young people are year 11…and work towards whatever qualifications they can…ESOL and they might be able to take a GCSE in maths for example or in French if that's their first language or Arabic"

Often the experiences that young Refugees and Asylum Seekers go through force them to mature emotionally but not necessarily mentally, in terms of being prepared for employment or higher education. As the comments below suggest, many unaccompanied minors start a family of their own as soon as possible, in an attempt to regain some stability in their lives.

"what I have found from anecdotal evidence rather than keeping statistics, is that a lot of young women tend to have children very soon and boys get involved in a relationship sometimes with local young women and just create a family and it's almost like, they kind of replace what they've lost"

"they're quite often not ready in a financial sense for that, but emotionally they're adults, they've had to be adults from a very young age"

Understandably many do not see higher education as a priority,

"We don't see loads going to university or anything like that, and they could, some of them could as they've got the ability, but that's not their aspiration, but maybe their children will"

4.422 The role of the library service

Their needs are complex and require a number of organisations to work together to support them. There are specific needs that Connexions can deal with, however the library service can play a role in supporting these young people too. When asked if they liaise with the library service the BME/ Team Manager replied,

"Yeah we've had a really good relationship with the library"

Her team was involved in developing specialist training sessions for staff in Nottingham City libraries to raise awareness about working with Refugees and Asylum Seekers. She also worked closely with a member of staff that was funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation to improve access to library services for Refugees and Asylum Seekers in the city. Young people were referred from Connexions and taken to the Central library where they were given a tour, and shown what the library has to offer.

"some of the young people went for visits up to the library and she showed them how to access library cards and the internet"

"They maybe don't know what the range of services are, some people don't know you can get DVD's and things, I mean, they might see them but not realize they can borrow them"

Although, she is uncertain that this had the desired effect,

"I don't think it's that well used…"

However, one way in which the library service in Nottingham is successfully supporting Refugees and Asylum Seekers is through work experience placements. This is an area in which Camden and Leicester have been very active, as referred to in Chapter 6. The placements in Nottingham are currently held in one library, Strelley Road, although there are plans to expand them to other libraries in the city.

The placements were organized by one of her colleagues and the Head of Social Inclusion at Nottingham City Libraries who met at a multi-agency meeting. It is important for library representatives to make themselves known in order to build up relationships with other agencies. She comments,

"there's always been a presence at multi-agency meetings from the library"

As yet the placements have involved 2 female students, one Kurdish and one Somalian. The benefits to the students are numerous, they gain work experience in the UK enabling them to develop their CV, it provides them with a sense of self

worth and they can improve their language skills through interaction with the public.

> *"they can say I'm learning English and I'm a student at college and I'm on placement here"*

> *"the two students that have been part of it gained so much confidence…one of the main tasks they were given was to support the children when they came in and they both really enjoyed doing that"*

Through gaining experience in a library they are able to develop skills in dealing with a range of people from different age groups and backgrounds and with very different needs.

As well as benefiting the student, Refugee work placements have a positive impact on the whole community. The visible presence of Refugees contributing to the local community in a positive role is important in challenging negative stereotypes.

> *"it's really good for the community to see a Refugee working there, particularly somewhere like Strelley, it raises the profile and image of what a Refugee is and what they can do as part of the community. Working in a library, that's a really good thing"*

It also benefits the children who come into the library as it raises their awareness and gives them a different perspective on Refugees.

> *"And it's good for the children to see…one of the young women is from Somalia and she's completely covered apart from her face, so they were all asking her questions…where do you come from and why do you speak like that…It's really good experience for them"*

"It's really good for the children to see a real life Asylum Seeker and know that they're a student and can learn English and can do all these good things"

Asked why she thought libraries were a good environment for Refugees to undergo work experience she commented,

"I think it's good when they're not very busy. It's good for them to meet children, they don't need to have CRB checks as they're not caring for them but can have access to working with them in that kind of controlled environment"

"it's quite quiet and peaceful, it's a safe environment and for a young woman who has had some very traumatic experiences, it's not like throwing her into something threatening"

"also it promotes education and learning"

Building a representative workforce that reflects diversity in the community is an ongoing challenge for libraries. Taking on people from BME groups, including Refugees and Asylum Seekers for work experience is one way to improve this. As well as the individual benefiting, the library also gains from their skills and experiences. For example, they can bring a new perspective to how the stock is organized and whether there is adequate signage.

If organizing work placements for Refugees and Asylum Seekers certain issues need to be taken into consideration. They may have complex needs and face personal or other barriers that require constant support from both frontline staff and managers. For example, at Strelley road library one of the students failed to turn up on her first day,

"There was a situation…she didn't turn up for her first session, this student who was very timid was not used to being treated well…I asked her if she was a bit nervous and said I'd take her…I left her with one of the staff and said she's a bit nervous can you take her under your wing…"

Staff were then briefed about her background and needs in order to help them understand more about her situation. This helped her to gain confidence and fit in with the team.

"already there was a willingness to support this young woman and support her in any way they could and they got to know her and liked her and now they've got a very different young woman who's quite well educated and will speak for herself and is very polite"

4.43 Interview with Representative from Asylum Link Merseyside

Asylum Link Merseyside is an organisation based in Liverpool offering "friendship, help and advice" to Refugees and Asylum Seekers in the Liverpool area. A registered charity it is also dedicated to raising public awareness around Refugee issues (Asylum Link website, 2007).

There are currently 7 staff working for the organization, 4 of them full time. There are also 40 volunteers, half of whom are Asylum Seekers themselves. The clients are mostly males, two thirds men to one third women, in their late 20's and early 30's.

4.431 Needs and Services on offer

Asylum Link Merseyside operates as a drop-in centre providing a range of services including advice about immigration and benefit entitlements and support to Asylum Seekers in sub standard accommodation.

“One of the biggest areas of work for us is advice and advocacy, so a lot of it’s welfare benefits advice, chasing up support payments, arguing that people should be moved to different areas”

They also offer computer and English classes run in partnership with a local college.

“We deliver English and computer classes at a community college run by our volunteers. We also have the Adult Learning Service at the council come and deliver classes from time to time”

There are increasing numbers of destitute Asylum Seekers “categorised generally as those who cannot for some reason be returned to their country of origin but receive no statutory support” in the UK (Asylum Link Merseyside website, 2007). These are people with a wide range of basic needs from housing to food. The drop in centre is their lifeline..

“We do destitution support, it’s very limited housing and hosting and emergency cash grants, food and clothing”

“some of the people that volunteer are actually destitute so it’s one of the only places they can get any money. They get travel expenses and a lunch allowance”

Volunteering at the charity provides people with a sense of purpose; they can learn about the local community and improve their language skills.

“half the volunteers are Asylum Seekers themselves so it’s their chance to fill in some time and put something back”

“it’s an ideal way to learn about the country and about the area you live in”

There are also leisure activities on offer such as embroidery, sewing and cookery classes. They run bicycle refurbishment courses and the 'Eden Allotments project' that won the Changing Lives category at the 2007 Groundwork Environmental awards. These leisure activities give enjoyment and improve quality of life. Referring to the allotments project the website states,

> The project has…shown asylum seekers and refugees in a positive light and given many people something to aim for…provides food for hungry and destitute people…and understanding about the needs of…a group at the extreme margins of our society (Asylum Link Merseyside website, 2007).

Asylum Link Merseyside are fundamental to improving the quality of life of Liverpool's Refugees and Asylum Seekers. The comments below summarise the vital service they provide.

> *"basically it's a centre where you can come and access most of the things that you would require as an Asylum Seeker as a Refugee… There's not much that we can't do"*

> *"people quite often come for one thing and then leave with three or four others"*

4.432 Role of the library service

Unlike Asylum Link and other Refugee charities or organizations, the library cannot provide services to meet the primary needs of these groups, particularly accommodation, clothes and food. However, it can take on a supporting role for secondary needs such as improving English, providing internet and IT facilities and information about the local community.

When asked if he thought libraries have any relevance to Refugees and Asylum Seekers, he mentioned the importance of the library to destitute Asylum Seekers in particular, as it provides somewhere free and welcoming to go.

> *"Yes, we've always known that. If you're destitute the library's the one place you can go…people use libraries in all sorts of ways, and definitely people go to the Central Library and read newspapers from other countries, to access the internet and also it's a place to meet people, to just have a bit of normality in your life"*

> *"We would like to encourage more Asylum Seekers to go to libraries because inevitably if you're next to a source of information, particularly if it's free, you'll find things out"*

He was then asked if Asylum Link actively promote libraries to their clients. They do promote library services in particular the internet, although this is informally done on an ad hoc basis. His comments reveal that they could do more.

> *"We could do more to promote libraries. We had envisaged training up some volunteers who would take people down to the local library…but that's quite difficult to do especially during the summer when numbers drop, the community college stops and there's other things going on"*

To resolve this issue a representative from the library service could visit Asylum Link to show samples of the resources available and services on offer.

4.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter presents the results of research carried out to establish the information and library needs of Refugees and Asylum Seekers and the barriers they face preventing them from using the service. The results are drawn from a literature review, a small focus group conducted with 6 participants from the

Refugee community and 2 interviews with members of staff from Connexions and the Liverpool based charity Asylum Link Merseyside.

The research suggests that Refugees and Asylum Seekers have a variety of complex needs. These can be divided into four categories, political, social, economic and cultural. The most important information needs relate to legal advice, language, the local community, integration and citizenship, health, education and employment.

Learning English is a priority and accessing materials such as dictionaries and basic guides as well as support through ESOL classes is a fundamental need. It is also important for these groups to access information and resources in their first language.

The results of the focus group support the findings in the literature review that Refugees and Asylum Seekers have diverse information and library needs. The participants in the group are aware of the range of library services on offer and use them to varying degrees. Services used include the children's library, adult lending services (both fiction and non fiction), computer facilities and materials to improve language and literacy skills. Suggested improvements to the service ranged from holding ESOL classes within the library to redecorating the walls.

The interviews revealed insights into the needs of unaccompanied minors. They have often experienced traumatic events and have diverse language needs. Many want to rebuild their lives by settling down and establishing their own families. Work experience placements for Refugees have provided them with self confidence and transferable skills that can be applied to future employment. The issue of destitute Asylum Seekers was raised and their need for ongoing support at a basic and secondary level. Libraries offer a safe and welcoming environment and free use of most, if not all of their services.

Chapter 5: Presentation and Discussion of Results II

5.1 Sheffield and Liverpool Libraries

This chapter presents results from the questionnaire sent to library managers and interviews conducted with staff at Sheffield and Liverpool Libraries. All the data collected was qualitative and analysed using the content analysis method. Using two methods of data collection for the same purpose was intended to give more in depth results.

The questionnaire was designed to complement data gathered from interviews with the Community Development Librarian responsible for services to Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Sheffield and the Citizenship and Equality Officer and Lifelong Learning Manager, who organize the 'Welcome To Your Library' (WTYL) project in Liverpool.

5.2 Questionnaire Results

In Sheffield the questionnaire was targeted to 4 staff who manage libraries situated in areas of the city where there are Refugee and Asylum Seeker communities. In Liverpool, the questionnaire was sent to 4 staff who manage libraries that are involved with the WTYL project or have experience of these groups. 4 responded from Sheffield and 2 from Liverpool. Although the sample is small, it was thought that focusing on specific staff that are known to have awareness and an understanding of these communities would produce better results.

The results from both authorities are discussed in the order of the questions. Comments from the questionnaire are in quotation marks and italics to distinguish them from the main text.

5.21 The need for services to Refugees and Asylum Seekers

5.211 To what extent is support for Refugees and Asylum Seekers a priority for the Public Library Service?

In Sheffield the respondents all considered support to be a “high priority” or “quite a high priority”. Liverpool also thought this was seen as a priority The following comments stood out,

“Quite a high priority as their numbers are significantly increasing in certain parts of the city” (Sheffield)

“Any vulnerable group or individual should be a priority for the library service” (Sheffield)

“This is a high priority in Liverpool….we have a Citizenship and Equality officer who takes the lead on this”

5.212 What do you think are the primary library and information needs of this particular group?

Respondents from both Sheffield and Liverpool cited similar needs. These were access to the People’s Network computers, particularly to use the internet, reading materials in their own language including newspapers, magazines and fiction, English language learning materials, information about employment, education, benefits and health care and citizenship information.

One respondent from Liverpool identified the importance of a *“positive response from staff on visiting the library”* and noted that staff flexibility and commitment was vital for this group,

“Staff who are willing to try and find what the individual wants even if it means using some unconventional methods”

5.213 What do you think are the actual or potential barriers preventing refugees and asylum seekers from using the library?

Both authorities commented on language difficulties and lack of confidence in entering the library. One respondent in Sheffield raised important issues about fear of losing or damaging borrowed items and commented there may be *"nowhere safe to keep the items they borrow"*.

Two from Sheffield and one from Liverpool mentioned a lack of awareness of the library service and what it can offer them.

"Perception of libraries as 'not for them'"

"No previous contact with a public library…lack of awareness that joining is free"

Linked to their perception of the library service, one respondent from Sheffield identified the "imposing" library building "institutional" as a barrier. Interestingly only one respondent (Sheffield) considered lack of identification or a lack of sponsor to be a barrier.

5.22 Library Services provided by the authority

5.221 Do you think providing services to refugees and asylum seekers is a priority for Sheffield/Liverpool Libraries?

3 library staff from Sheffield and one from Liverpool answered "yes" they do think it is a priority. Further comments included,

"Yes. They are a distinctive group with a particular set of needs and their presence is increasing particularly in the area served by the library which I line manage" (Sheffield)

However, one respondent commented that services to this group are not necessarily a priority as they are not seen as a *"homogenous group"*. The other

response from Liverpool echoed this stating that it is *"not necessarily"* a priority as Liverpool Libraries are committed to providing services to *"all residents in Liverpool"* and Refugees and Asylum Seekers are part of this.

5.222 What resources and services are available to Refugees and Asylum Seekers in your particular library or libraries?

All respondents cited *"internet access"* and *"People's Network computers"* with Liverpool emphasizing they provide *"free"* access. All respondents stated they provide material in *"community languages"* including newspapers, magazines and books. One respondent from Sheffield and one from Liverpool referred to *"Asian language films"* and *"audiovisual materials"*. One respondent from Liverpool stated they have specialist collections,

"A collection of Chinese books and Black writer's book and history collection"

Resources to support learning English including books and audio tapes were mentioned by 2 staff in Sheffield and one in Liverpool. Translation services are offered by two libraries in Sheffield, one by phone. Citizenship information is only mentioned by one respondent (Sheffield).

Community and Council information was mentioned by both authorities. Liverpool can access information in *"assorted languages"* and have a directory of local groups and services. Both also mention materials for children *"Bookstart information and packs"* (Sheffield) and *"dual language children's books"* (Liverpool).

Both authorities state the importance of their library staff.

"We have a general welcoming atmosphere with a staff that is willing to help assist in any way they can" (Liverpool)
"Sympathetic and friendly staff!" (Sheffield)

"One of my libraries is based in a healthy living centre where some of the reception staff speak community languages" (Sheffield)

5.223 Do you think these resources and services reflect the needs of Refugee and Asylum Seeker users?

All staff from Sheffield thought that their resources and services did reflect the needs of these users although one thought it was difficult to know for certain,

"my worry is that sometimes people are unwilling to ask for more and tend to be grateful for the basics" (Sheffield)

Another concern involves the amount of resources available such as community language books or materials for learning English. One respondent comments that they are *"maybe not in the quantity needed"* (Sheffield). This echoes another response from Sheffield which states that more People's Network terminals are needed to cater for the high demand of users.

One respondent from Liverpool does not believe that the resources and services in his library reflect the needs of Refugees and Asylum Seekers. Whereas the other is more positive,

"On the whole the service does reflect the current need. It is flexible and we are able to amend services as required. (E.g. bringing in stock from other libraries when required for group visits)"

5.23 Promotion of Services

5.231 What does your library or authority do that encourages Refugees and Asylum Seekers to use the library?

Both the staff from Liverpool referred to the Citizenship and Equality Officer, Denise Jones who is responsible for the WTYL project. They comment on the outreach activities that she does to promote the library's resources and facilities.

“Denise encourages and contacts local groups and individuals to encourage library use”

One also refers to the Council’s policy to *“actively encourage social inclusion”.* They regularly have displays of books in different languages and ‘Quick Reads’ and Adult Learning classes are advertised in the library. They also promote local events such as the ‘Kensington African Festival’.

They have links with other organizations in the city who promote their services. The library also offers it’s facilities for events.

“We have contacts with Kensington regeneration and…we promote “time together” and the staff have promoted and encouraged individuals to use the library”

“They also know our facility is available to use if required for events etc”

Sheffield also works in partnership with other organizations that are already working with Refugee groups and promote the service through them,

“works with partners who already provide services, advertises in settings such as mosques and refuges”

They also refer to the Community Development Librarian Laura Bell, who is responsible for developing and promoting services for this group and her outreach work.

Like Liverpool, Sheffield promotes cultural events, such as ‘Refugee Week’ through displays, story sessions, talks and reading groups,

“One of my libraries celebrated refugee week this year by reading ‘The Kite Runner’”

5.232 How effective do you consider this to be?

Sheffield’s comments on how effective these activities are range from *“very effective”* to *“not sure”*. One respondent comments that it *“works well”* in some areas but “*there are isolated pockets who we don’t reach”.*

Staff in Liverpool think the promotion of their services is effective although the practice is *“always open for change and modification.”*

One respondent reinforces that it is the barriers faced by Refugees themselves, such as “*how much they feel confident to come in the library”* that is the *“major issue”*.

.**5.24 Suggestions for improving the service**

Sheffield suggest that more outreach work especially within ESOL classes would benefit the service. 2 respondents comment on accessing more funding to host events and activities that celebrate the different cultures of Refugee groups and hopefully bring them into the library.

Another issue that a respondent from Sheffield raises is to encourage a more diverse workforce in libraries.

“More staff speaking the main community language may mean we get more idea of what refugees and asylum seekers would really like us to provide”

In Liverpool the respondents suggest that they should continue with what they are doing in helping to assist the Citizenship and Equality Officer with her *“projects/promotions”* and *“continue to liaise with and build contacts with local groups in the area”*.

One respondent highlights the need for continual staff training at all levels,

“Staff have had some training but are awaiting further training to better understand the needs of refugees and asylum seekers”

They also refer to offering activity sessions for under 5’s as a way to encourage parents and children in to the library *“to see and use the service”*.

5.3 Interviews

The interviews were unstructured although an interview plan covering important areas for discussion was prepared in advance. These areas were library services Refugees and Asylum Seekers including resources and outreach, community consultation and partnership working with other organizations, suggested improvements for the service including staff training. The direction of the interview was dictated by the interviewee’s responses and any unexpected information that emerged was explored through further questioning.

The results from both authorities will be presented

Results will be explored further in the discussion section.

The first interview to be discussed is Sheffield

5.31 Sheffield: Interview with Laura Bell, Community Development Librarian for Asylum Seekers and Refugees

5.311 Library services for Refugees and Asylum Seekers

The interview revealed that there are no specific services for Refugees and Asylum Seekers provided by Sheffield Libraries. All services are for everyone living in the city. Each area of Sheffield also has its own Community Development Librarian responsible for promoting services and encouraging library use.

However, specific services may be promoted to certain groups if they are considered of particular interest or benefit. One such service is the Bookstart project which is a national programme encouraging all children from as early an age as possible to develop a lifelong love of books and reading. It also encourages parents and carers to share in their children's reading activities (Bookstart website, 2007). In Sheffield the project is run in Burngreave library, an ethnically diverse area of the city with a tradition of refugee communities settling there.

> *"we've got the Bookstart project that's targeted specifically towards vulnerable people in the community and refugees and asylum seekers"*

Other services that are open to everyone but have been targeted towards Refugees and Asylum Seekers include hosting or promoting events for Refugee Week and local cultural festivals.

> *"for Refugee Week, we did some events, we did some storytelling, but that was open to anybody who speaks Arabic. So although we promoted it amongst some of the refugee communities, anybody who wanted to enjoy stories in Arabic could come along"*

> *"we try to go to Summer festivals…it's not always specifically about Refugees"*

Many services involve outreach where the Community Development Librarian visits groups and organizations in the city that support Refugees. This has included visiting a women's Conversation Club held near Tinsley library and inviting them for a tour and explaining what the library service has to offer them. Other outreach work includes a local ESOL organization regularly bringing groups in for tours of the Central Library.

"There's an organization called REACH and they teach English…they have a regular slot in the Central Library and each term or every few weeks they bring a different class in for tours round the building and to show people what resources there are"

Other work that the library is in the process of establishing is setting up a reading or writing group to take place in the Central Library. Again this would not be specifically targeted towards Refugees and Asylum Seekers but anyone who's first language is not English.

"We're starting a reading group or a writing group at the Central Library…we want to talk about people enjoying books and that pleasurable side of it…we're conscious that we're not teachers of English"

Outreach work is important as it extends the service taking the library to groups and individuals that may not be aware of what it has to offer. It appears to be working in Sheffield by raising the profile of the service. When asked if many people from the groups she visits have already joined the library, she replied

"Some have some haven't. Some people are in and out everyday and they're fine using it, totally confident. And other people say didn't realize it was free, didn't know it was there"

However, there are parts of this community that do not use libraries. She notes how children are more used to using libraries through their education, whereas for adults who are "removed from that…or never had any sort of formal schooling" the library can seem daunting.

"A lot of the ladies I used to speak to in Burngreave, their children would use the library…but they had never come into the library…I found that

quite interesting that though they think it's a valuable activity for their children, they don't see it as being relevant to them"

This is possibly due to cultural or gender issues. Women have possibly not been given the educational opportunities that men have and therefore do not feel that the library has anything to offer them.

5.312 Understanding the community

It is important to have an understanding of the local Refugee community in order to know which libraries should offer which services. One of the most effective ways of finding out the needs is through consulting with these groups themselves. Much of the consultation is done informally through talking to people in the library and engaging during outreach activities.

"Like I'll say to a guy did you know we've got Russian books at the central library and he'll say to me yeah, I've read all of them"

"with Bookstart, we've asked parents what books they would like to see in the library and we've asked them to choose stock as well…we were planning on taking a group to a bookshop to choose, but it hasn't quite happened yet"

Using information on the ethnicity of library users is another way of determining what stock to buy, although this may not reflect the type of stock that the user wants to borrow,

"you're never sure if someone who says they're Somali or Pakistani, they may be British Pakistani and born in Britain or living here for 20 odd years and they're not necessarily interested in reading books in Urdu"

Community Librarians covering each area of the city are best placed to judge what stock and services are needed as they get to know their user base.

> *"I guess the point of having people like myself in different communities is I know what demands and stock are here so I can say yes, there's a Bengali community here and they're reading Bengali books"*

In trying to communicate the value of libraries the Community Development Librarian also liaises with other organizations in the city working with Refugees and Asylum Seekers.

> *"I try and promote my role as a link from Sheffield Libraries to other organizations in the city. I try to go to Refugee Forum and everybody meets up there. And I go to Migration Network meetings, which is also a great way to meet people"*

> *"I'm just constantly bumping into people and talking to them and saying to them Library, Library, Library"*

5.313 Improvements

Laura Bell commented on the need to cater more for *"smaller languages"* that may only be spoken by a few people in the city. She also commented on the need for staff training in order to encourage a more *"proactive"* and *"positive"* approach. There is currently no specific staff training for working with Refugees and Asylum Seekers although they are in the process of rearranging their cultural awareness training programme to include this. This will provide information about

> *"who refugees are in Sheffield and why they're here…and something about how they're using the library and how we can help"*

She comments that she has encountered some negative attitudes from staff towards these groups and their library use,

> *"I sometimes still hear comments about Asylum Seekers coming here and only using the People's Network as if that's not 'proper' use of the library, they should be taking out books"*

She notes the increasing importance of all staff becoming aware of the needs of these communities due to asylum seekers being dispersed more widely throughout the city. Training in this area will also help equip staff with the confidence to challenge negative attitudes when they hear them.

Another area identified as needing improvement is joining procedures,

> *"We need something with their signature and something with their address…they should have an address, their housing provider should be able to write them something"*

Currently for anyone who only has one form of identification, such as Asylum Seekers they can be registered as a limited or reduced member where they can take 2 books out as opposed to the 10 allowed on full membership. However, this treats certain people as *"second class citizens"*. The registration form itself is also considered a barrier for some users,

> *"There's definitely some pieces of work we need to do about enrolment forms because our current ones are 2 sides of A4 and I think that's very off putting"*

5.32 Liverpool: Interview with Denise Jones Citizenship and Equality Officer and Andy Johnson Lifelong Learning Manager

5.321 Library services and resources: before the project and beyond

Prior to the start of the WTYL project in Liverpool Libraries, staff were aware of the growing need to provide services for increasing populations of new comers to the city, namely Economic Migrants, Refugees and Asylum Seekers. They found that their existing stock and services were limited in this area although staff had noticed that the People's Network computers were *"fulfilling a need"* within these groups. Via the internet users can access a range of services in different languages and through email can maintain contact with family or friends who have been dispersed around the UK or are still in their home country.

> *"Our computers were attracting a lot of people in anyway…the great thing about a computer is that you know you can get any language up on the screen, of course if you're moving around then email remains a constant so connects you, it allows you to stay in touch with friends and family"*

Individuals from these groups have approached library staff to find out how to access the internet and register for an email account.
The project enabled Denise Jones to undertake a review of the existing stock and services relevant to Refugee groups. Materials in community languages were identified as an area that Liverpool needed to improve on. Resources in Chinese and certain Asian languages were being provided and a collection of Black interest materials in English but *"nothing else".*

Resources will be bought with an increased budget and put into libraries in areas of the city where these communities are based. This will include new books in key languages Farsi, Arabic, Urdu and French, the development of specific notice boards with information of interest and a range of leaflets in alternative languages.

The Central Library in Liverpool is currently a centre for Citizenship tests. This is another area of development for the community libraries.

> *at the moment we're looking to possibly network 'Life in Britain', which is basically the citizenship test…it's all self directed, you can log on with your name and it gives you your progress"*

They are looking to pilot it at two libraries and *"see if it's popular"*.

5.322 Community Consultation and Networking

Consulting organizations in the city that already support Refugees and Asylum Seekers was important in deciding which services needed to be developed for these groups. The organizations Liverpool has consulted with include Refugee Action, who have a branch in the city, community based arts organizations and charities such as Asylum Link Merseyside.

At the preliminary stage of the project it was vital to build a community profile of which migrant communities were present in the city. This was done through "*asking organizations for their stats and figures"*.

Establishing the library service as an agency that has a valid contribution to make to Refugee communities was another part of the early stages of the project. Networking with these organizations enabled this,

> *"it's actually raised the profile of the library service with other local organizations and we've approached them and they've said what can you do and we've told them and they've said I never thought of approaching the library service for that"*

This is a continual process that requires a relationship of trust to be developed over a period of time.

"we've found from approaching other organizations that they can be suspicious of you motives…so you find that you have to build up a relationship over time until they understand that you're not just doing it to tick a box for local government standards, that you're really available to help and assist"

In turn these organizations act as 'PR' for the library service promoting what is on offer to their users.

In consulting with the Refugees and Asylum Seekers themselves, this has proved to be difficult,

"At one point we did consider doing a questionnaire and then other organizations said they just won't fill that out…because of language barriers and social barriers as well"

"there's a suspicion because some of these groups don't really want to give out information to anything that smacks of local government because ultimately it could be used against them"

There is some informal consultation with the communities that comes from feedback from staff. However, the majority of information they have is gathered from organizations such as Asylum Link.

5.323 Improvements and developments

One area identified for improvement is to overcome the barrier of having to show two forms of identification to join the library. Liverpool is currently piloting an *"open door policy"* in one library where no ID is required just a name and address. There are other ways they are thinking of tackling this,

> *"we're thinking of possibly having a three tier level, one with no ID at all allowed to borrow books, one with basic ID that allows you to borrow DVDs and one with at least two forms of ID for the Archive Material and Record Office…for the majority of people it would be no ID at all, but certainly we know most Asylum Seekers have one piece of ID with a name and address on"*

Another idea currently in development is to give a postcard to all Asylum Seekers that says 'I am an Asylum Seekers and I'd like to join the library' and 'my name is…' which they can hand to staff and it will count as their form of ID. This will also overcome confidence issues and the language barrier.

Another major issue for Liverpool is staff training. Currently this involves diversity training delivered by the council which is optional although *"quite a few"* library staff have attended. They recognize the importance of training for all staff,

> *"there is a need for all staff to be trained …it's in our agenda in general to raise everyone's awareness and do myth busting because there's a lot of assumptions made"*

However, they note that the real need is to raise awareness in the relief staff who are only encountering these users occasionally and consequently experience a *"culture shock"*. One way they are overcoming this is by producing a film that reveals the truth about Asylum in general and provides facts about the migrant communities living in Liverpool. The film will involve Refugees themselves who are part of Arts organizations in the city, such as dancers, artists and film makers.

There is an idea to put the film on You Tube in order for it to be seen as widely as possible. It is hoped that this will enable the film to raise awareness in staff without having to give them formal training.

"the operational staff generally can't be released for formal training sessions so you have to be really creative with what you do"

Another area being developed is Conversation clubs. Researching ESOL provision for Refugees and Asylum Seekers, Denise Jones and Andy Johnson found that for many the courses take place once a week and they have nobody to practice their English on between sessions. They therefore identified that the library could develop a Conversation group to help with this. This can also make a wider contribution to integration,

"this will help to integrate new comers into society…bringing people together to use the same services and local amenities together, so in effect it becomes the norm rather than something unusual"

5.4 Interview with Helen Carpenter Welcome To Your Library Project Coordinator

The interview questions focused on the background to the Welcome To Your Library project, it's progression from being piloted in London to being implemented nationally and the development of services in Liverpool a participating authority. Issues that emerged during the interview are discussed in chapter 6.

5.5 Summary

This chapter presented the results from the questionnaire and interviews with library staff in Sheffield and Liverpool and began a preliminary discussion of the findings. It also referred to a telephone interview with the Welcome To Your Library project coordinator Helen Carpenter, which will be discussed in more detail in the further discussion section.

Both authorities consider providing services to Refugees and Asylum Seekers to be a priority for their authority. The results from the questionnaire showed that services to these communities are part of mainstream provision and include access to the People's Network, materials to help with learning English, books and other resources in community languages, community information and leaflets translated into a variety of languages. Outreach work is another important part of the service and includes visiting Refugee groups and holding events within the library.

The interviews with specialist members of staff revealed the importance of networking with key organizations that support these communities in order to raise the profile of the library service. They also highlight the need for continual evaluation and development of the service. Areas for improvement include the need for staff training to challenge negative attitudes and instill confidence and the need to remove barriers such as the requirement to show two forms of ID, that prevent the library being used by these communities. Both authorities are considering new and creative ways to achieve this.

Chapter 6: Further Discussion

The previous chapter presented the results and began a discussion of the findings. In this chapter these findings will be discussed further.

6.1 Networking and Partnership working

One issue to emerge from the research is the importance of networking with other agencies and organizations. Consulting with community groups and organizations working with Refugees and Asylum Seekers is the most important way of gathering information about the demographics of the community and what their needs are. This information is then used to inform what stock is needed and at which location. In the interview Helen Carpenter noted that understanding the community

> *"enables you to start to think more coherently about the area, what it comprises, if it's changing rapidly and will continue…these are the decisions we need to make around resources for stock development"*

The results from the interviews with Sheffield and Liverpool suggest that both authorities are actively networking with Refugee organizations. Denise Jones has made herself known to Asylum Link Merseyside, one of the major life lines for Asylum Seekers in the city, in particular those who are destitute. From the interview with the representative from Asylum Link, it is clear that they are aware of what the library can and does offer their clients. Although they admit they could do more to promote the library's services. In Sheffield Laura Bell is a point of contact for both library staff and external organizations. She liaises with conversation clubs in the city as part of her outreach work and attends multi-agency meetings.

As the interview with Liverpool revealed trust issues and a reluctance to talk to people seen to be connected to local government often prevents communication between libraries and Refugee communities themselves. This emphasises the

importance of networking with these organizations. However, anecdotal evidence from frontline staff indicates that consultation with Refugee groups does occur although on an informal basis.

Results from the questionnaires reinforce that both authorities are involved with multi-agency working. One respondent highlighted the role that other agencies and organizations can play in raising awareness of the library service and promoting what it has to offer. Advocating the role of libraries is an important part of the WTYL project.

6.2 Sustainability of Services

A major concern of the second phase of the WTYL project is ensuring that services are sustainable long after the project has finished. To ensure this no external project officers were employed. Having existing members of staff manage WTYL provides organizations and communities with a key contact in the library service. As Helen Carpenter comments,

> *"they're the core staff who, after the end of the period of Welcome To Your Library, at the end of 2007, will still be there. There's not suddenly this business of it collapsing because there's no more money to fund the post"*

The way the project has been organized in terms of planning, documenting and evaluating as they go along, means that should a key contact leave their position the person taking over will be able to carry on with the work without having to *"reinvent the wheel".*

As well as the management side of the project the services are also sustainable.

> *"everything that we've achieved everything that we're planning is sustainable, it's going to carry on after the project"*

Liverpool has learnt from consultation with other organizations that one off events are mostly ineffective whereas developing services that are part of mainstream provision is the best way to get these communities in to the library.

In Sheffield services are also developed to be sustainable. There are Community Development Librarian's throughout the city who are all responsible for engaging with vulnerable or excluded groups in their area. Asylum Seekers are beginning to be dispersed more widely throughout the city and there is a sense that it is important that all staff take responsibility for providing services to this group.

6.3 Sharing Best Practice

One issue that emerged from the interview with staff in Liverpool is the sharing of experiences, ideas and 'best practice' across authorities. As discussed in the literature review in chapter 2, sharing experiences can be valuable for….. Liverpool commented that when they first began the project they thought more sharing of ideas would take place.

> *"we thought we'd be bouncing ideas off all the authorities. I think through phase one…they were possibly able to meet and get to know each other more. We have got to know some authorities but not as much as I thought"*

However, the staff in each authority responsible for managing the project have other pressures on their time such as line managing teams of staff and other social inclusion work. The project coordinator noted that meetings with the whole WTYL team are difficult to organize due to staff working part time, or having to look after their children and the distance between the authorities would have to involve overnight stays. She points out that *"regional networking"* would be easier to facilitate.

The WTYL website and weekly e-digest (see appendix 3 & 4) are intended to be tools for sharing information and ideas about this issue. When asked if they use the message board on the WTYL website (see appendix 5) Liverpool point out that this is a new resource and that not many people are aware of it yet. However, the Citizenship and Equality Officer has posted a query about Citizenship packages (see appendix 6).

When asked about the use of the WTYL message board the project coordinator commented,

> *"it's not used as much as I'd like it to be. I think you have to ease people in to things quite gently…And people do say they use the e-list , but that's very much in the consumption mode rather than necessarily posting things onto it"*

She states that there is a need for "*a web based practical resource that people can really share"* and people are using it although they are not necessarily involved with the WTYL project.

6.4 Work Placements for Refugees and Asylum Seekers

Another issue to emerge from the interviews and also reviewing the literature was the idea of libraries taking on Refugees for work placements. Evidence from the interviews with the BME/NDC Team Manager at Connexions and Asylum Link demonstrates the difficulty that Refugees have in finding work in the UK.

> *"for Refugees it's very difficult to bring the skills that you have in your home country to your new country…they come from a different system…and don't fit in with Britain's way of doing things"*
> (Asylum Link Merseyside)

Work placements can be a bridge to permanent employment through providing experience of the British workplace rules and regulations, building self esteem and developing CVs. Camden Libraries have developed a successful work experience programme offering 12 week placements of 15 hours per week to Refugees who are resident in the borough, have permission to work and have entry level 2 ESOL (Camden, 2006:1).

Libraries have problems with recruiting a diverse workforce and these work placements are one way in which this can be improved. In Sheffield the Community Development Librarian said that this was something they had not thought about but was an idea worth exploring. She commented that often people are interested in working in a library but do not have the skills to perform well in an interview and therefore it would be beneficial for them to experience the day to day running of a library. She noted that often the people interested are from BME groups.

Liverpool commented that they are not able to offer work placements as they operate from community libraries where they are short staffed and unable to provide extra support to volunteers. Their strategy for helping to develop Refugee's skills involves the conversation club. The club will provide Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Migrants with the opportunity to

> "mix with people from other cultures, practice conversational English within a safe environment, build confidence and develop skills" (Jones, 2007).

The interview revealed that Refugees and Asylum Seekers will also be invited to be volunteers,

“we are starting to come across people who are perfect for volunteering they’ve got good English skills and looking for something to do with their time”

Liverpool are creating opportunities for these communities within their own limitations.

6.5 Summary

The results discussed in this chapter are from all the research carried out and include the interview with the WTYL project coordinator Helen Capenter.

Certain issues emerged from the literature, questionnaires and interviews with both library and non library staff. These include the importance of networking and forming partnerships with community groups and other organizations. It is vital for libraries to consult other organizations to raise the profile of the library and to advocate working with Refugees and Asylum Seekers. Another issue is the need to develop services that are sustainable and not short term projects that are likely to end when funding runs out.

Sharing Best practice was identified as an area that needs to be improved. Liverpool thought that they would share more information with other WTYL partners, however this has not been the case. There is a need to develop sharing best practice although tools that are available for this such as the WTYL website and e-digest are not being used.

Another important area to emerge from the research was the development of work placements for Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Libraries. This improves their employability skills and develops confidence. Neither Liverpool nor Sheffield are currently in a position to offer these although Liverpool is developing a conversation club where Refugee groups will be able to develop their language skills.

Chapter 7: Conclusion and Recommendations

7.1 Conclusions

This aim of this research project was to investigate public library services for Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Sheffield and Liverpool. This conclusion will refer to the research objectives originally set out in chapter 1.

- To establish the library and information needs of Refugees and Asylum Seekers.
- To establish the barriers that prevent these groups from using the service.
- To investigate the current provision of library services to Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Sheffield and Liverpool.

7.2 Library and Information Needs

An examination of the literature revealed that there has been little research conducted into the information and Library needs of Refugees and Asylum Seekers. What research there is has concentrated on asking the opinions of Information Professionals and not these communities themselves.

This study set out to discover more about the library and information needs of these groups through a focus group with Refugees themselves and interviews with professionals not connected to the library service. This was important as it provided a range of perspectives. The interview with the Connexions BME/NDC Team manager revealed that the UK has many Asylum Seekers who are unaccompanied minors, under the age of 18. These young people have varied and complex needs. Connexions works to improve their educational prospects and prepare them for employment. They have set up specific courses to deal with the language needs of this group, due to the fact that many ESOL classes are one day a week and geared towards adults and these young people need to be in full time education in order to receive their support payments.

The library has a vital role to play in helping these young people through the transition period as they fit into British society and rebuild their lives. One of the ways in which this is happening in Nottingham is through work experience placements. These have been successful so far in that the young people have developed confidence and skills in dealing with the public. However one issue to emerge is that they require constant support and encouragement from the library staff.

The interview with Asylum Link provided interesting results emphasizing the increasing population of destitute Asylum Seekers. The library is an important service for these people as it is free, welcoming and a neutral space where they can access the internet and a wealth of information.

The main information and library needs that were revealed from the focus group were accessing materials in their own languages and to help with learning English, adequate signs in the library, possibly in a range of languages, so that they can easily find their way around and providing a welcoming space where they can meet friends, bring their children and relax. One of the outcomes from the focus group, although it cannot be generalized to the whole population is that these Refugees and Asylum Seekers at least are using libraries and benefiting from their services.

7.3 Public Library Services

Interviews were conducted with key librarians in Liverpool and Sheffield and a short questionnaire sent to other relevant staff in the authorities. The results showed that both authorities are providing a range of services that are relevant to Refugees and Asylum Seekers. Sheffield does not tend to view these communities as an homogenous group and therefore services are open to everyone. The specific focus of the Welcome To Your Library project in Liverpool

has enabled them to develop their community language collection and plan which services should be in particular libraries.

One of the most important areas to emerge from this research is that community consultation and networking with other organizations in the city, particularly supporting Refugees is vital to ensuring that services are catering for their needs. It is important that these relationships are developed as soon as possible and nurtured as it takes time to build trust. Working closely with these agencies also raises the profile of the library service within the wider community.

Prior to the Welcome To Your Library project Liverpool did not have an established service for these groups and it has given them the incentive to plan and develop services in this area. These are sustainable services that are becoming part of mainstream library policy. One significant service that they are in the process of developing is the conversation club. This will actively engage with vulnerable groups, including Economic Migrants and Refugees who want to improve their English and bring them into the library environment where they will be exposed to all resources and services. By encouraging Refugees to volunteer as well, they will be increasing their skills and developing confidence that could improve employment opportunities.
Helen Carpenter notes that Liverpool has done well in certain aspects

> “One of the things I’ve been impressed by in Liverpool is that Denise has managed to identify a significant amount of money around stock, which is going to change what they have. And also they’re in communication with appropriate groups to make sure that what is purchased is relevant and appropriate and not just somehow bought in a vacuum”.

To conclude, both authorities are providing services to cater for the needs of Refugee groups. However, there are areas that need improvement. The most significant is staff training to raise awareness of the experiences these

communities have and what the library can do to help. Liverpool is developing a film, partly made by Refugees themselves which raises awareness and challenges the myths surrounding Asylum. They want to put on You Tube to make it widely accessible.

7.4 Recommendations

Further research is needed into the needs of Refugee communities and other groups such as traveller communities and homeless people. It would be useful to conduct a large scale study into what Refugees use the library for. This would enable more relevant services to be developed.

Once the second phase of the Welcome To Your Library project comes to an end in November there will be a large scale evaluation. It was hoped that by the end of 2007 the project would have enabled all library authorities to develop their services for this group and that they would be mainstreamed. This would be an interesting investigation.

Liverpool commented that their work for the WTYL project was helping them to develop services for other excluded groups. This would make an interesting investigation, to find out how the principles of WTYL have been applied to other areas.

Appendix 1: Questionnaire for Library Staff Working with Refugees and Asylum Seekers, Sheffield Libraries

1. Your Job and Role

a. Please state your job title and the library/authority you work for

b. Please describe your role/involvement in developing/providing library services to refugees and asylum

2. The need for a public library service for Refugees and Asylum Seekers

a. To what extent is support for refugees and asylum seekers a priority for the Public Library Service?

b. What do you think are the primary library and information needs of refugees and asylum seekers?

c. What do you think are the actual or potential barriers preventing refugees and asylum seekers from using a Public Library?

3. Sheffield Library Resources and Services

a. Do you think providing services to refugees and asylum seekers is a priority for Sheffield libraries?

b. What resources and services are available to refugees and asylum seekers in your particular library?

c. Do you think these resources and services reflect the needs of refugee and asylum seeker users?

4. Promotion of Services

a. What does your library/authority do to encourage refugees and asylum seekers to use the library?

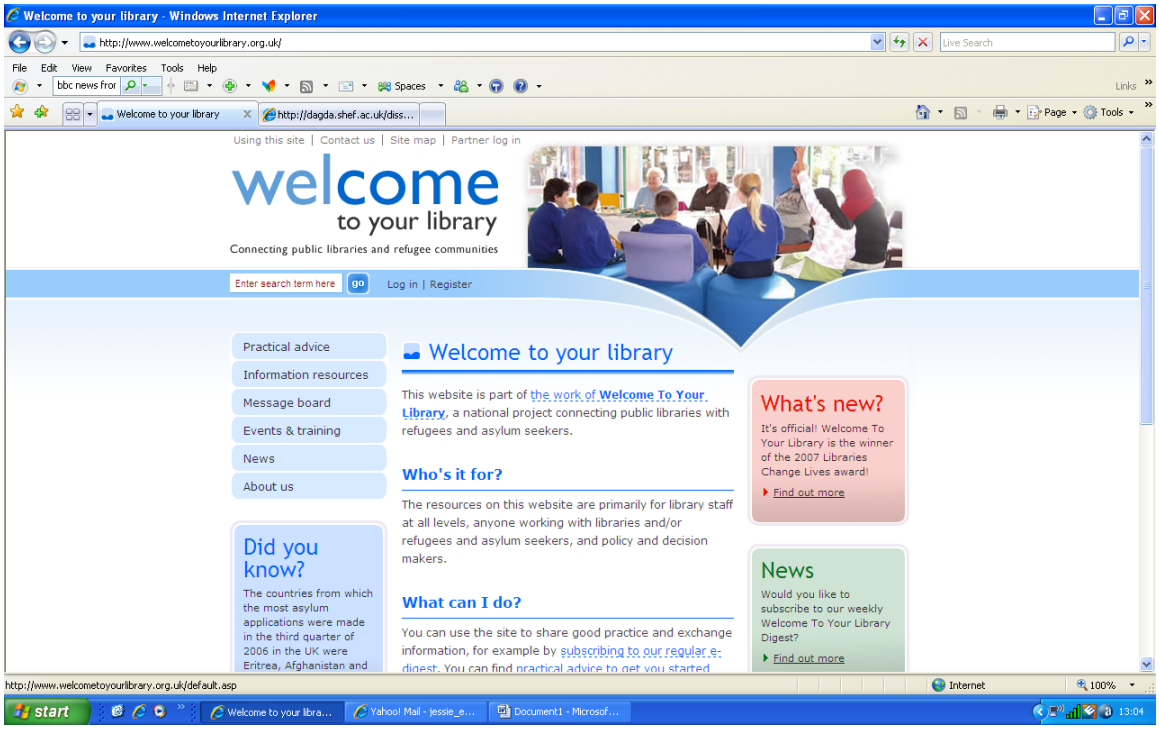
b. How effective do you consider these to be?

5. What suggestions do you have to improve/develop current services for refugees and asylum seekers in your library?

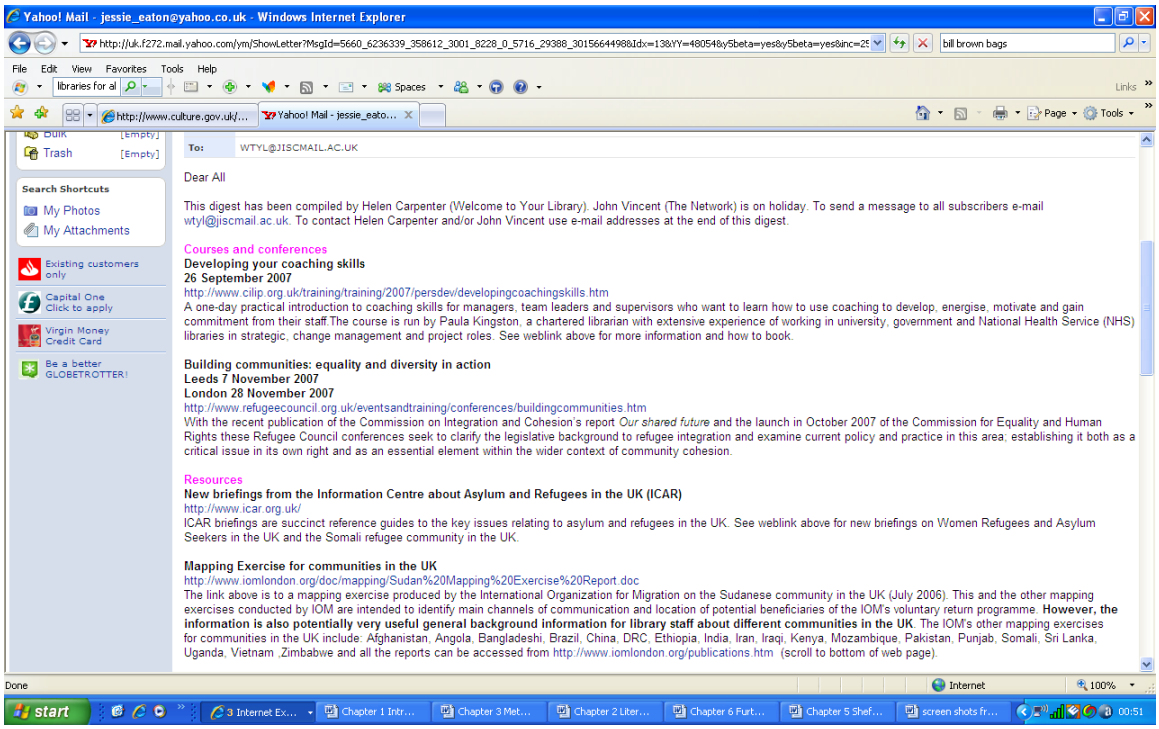
6. If you have any further comments please use the space below

Thank you for completing this questionnaire

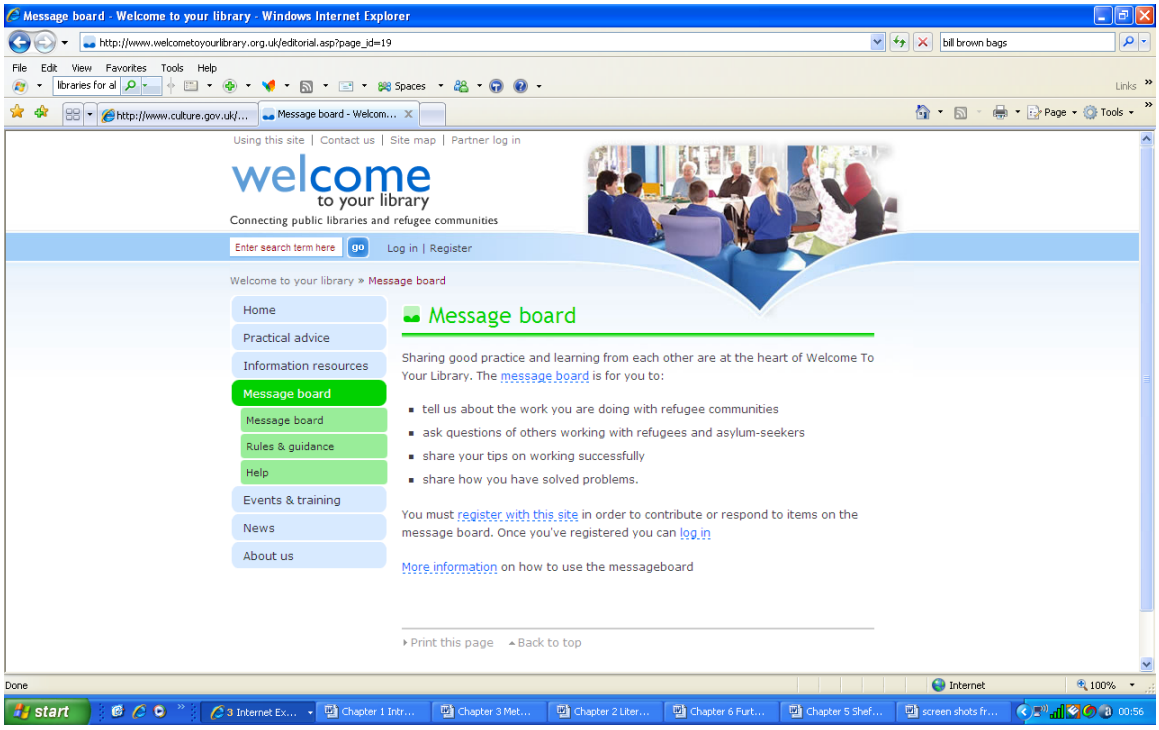
Appendix 2: Homepage of the 'Welcome To Your Library' website



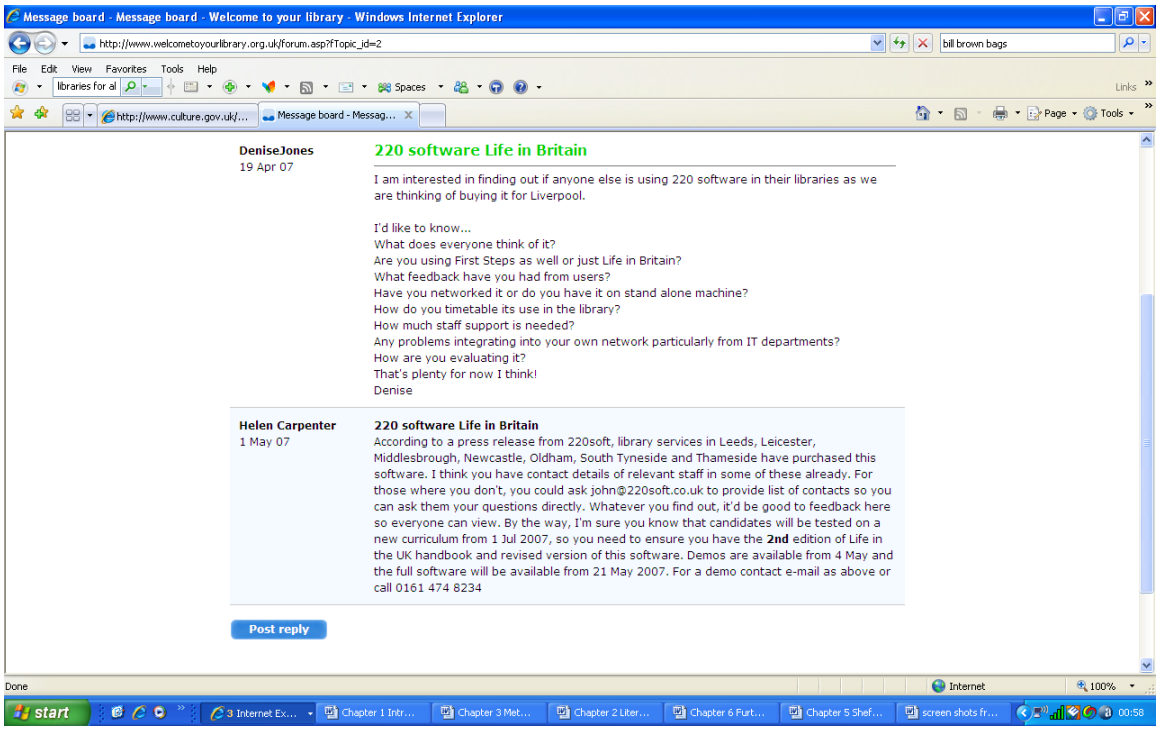
Appendix 3: e-digest



Appendix 4



Appendix 5



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