

Library leaders across England and Wales confirm the welcome offered to refugees and asylum seekers from public libraries

25 September 2015—The Society of Chief Librarians (SCL), along with colleagues in the Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians (ASCEL) have confirmed that public libraries are safe, trusted spaces and are able to offer a range of vital free services for new arrivals in local communities across the country. Libraries enable people to connect in new communities and remain connected to the communities and loved ones that they left behind.

With the Government's recent announcement of 20,000 refugees arriving in the country over the next 5 years, the nation's libraries have come together to extend a warm welcome to new arrivals and to offer practical and free support. This welcome is also extended to the existing 150,000 refugees, asylum seekers and stateless people who are currently in the country.

Using the [SCL's Universal Offers](#) and the [Children's Promise](#), library leaders have confirmed that the support for newly arrived people includes:

Free access to computers and wifi

Free access to materials to learn English, and access to physical and online resources in other languages (Including Welsh in Wales)

Free activities and reading resources for children and families

Trained workforce who can help with access to information and resources

Community space to use for learning and networking

Signposting to local education, health and wellbeing services

Signposting to other Council services

Signposting to community organisations and resources

Tours of the library and all services offered

Sarah Mears, Chair of ASCEL, said: "It is vital that children who have been through such traumatic experiences can learn to feel safe again and that they are well supported to thrive in their new communities. Public libraries as safe, trusted and inspiring places within local communities have a huge role to play in welcoming new arrivals and giving all children and their families the help they need to start their new lives".

Ciara Eastell, SCL President, said: "Public library staff are committed to helping and supporting people, it is what they are trained to do, and they do it with a high degree of sensitivity and compassion. There is no other place that has all of the vital resources and information under one roof, along with a comfortable place to sit, read, or rest. Libraries are ready to help new arrivals to the UK."

Jane Sellwood, Chair of SCL Wales, said: "The services provided by our public library network are available to everybody in our society but are particularly valuable to people in need. Our libraries are part of the glue that binds communities together, helping people to help themselves and enjoy a place in society where they are free from judgement or stigma. Public Libraries are safe and welcoming places that empower people and support the community in all its different forms."

Recent Examples of Refugees Helped in Libraries:

From an Ethiopian refugee who is claiming asylum. " I have been 3 years in Huddersfield and I use the library several times every week especially for the internet. Most of us know no-one when we arrive and the library is a vital place for us. We can meet people and the staff are good people to trust. For us there is not much space where we can spend time and I spend time reading and borrowing books as there is a very wide range. This helps me in many ways." This is a man educated to post grad level, who does not yet have leave to remain.

A young asylum seeker who did not want to name his birth country found Kirklees Libraries more than valuable. His story was not believed and he had no proof that he was even in his home country and in danger during the time period stated on his application for refugee status and leave to remain. He accessed the library internet daily to look for news from home and for anything that might strengthen his claim. He has now found a photo from a newspaper showing he was there then. The man standing next to him in the photo has also had to leave his homeland and he has already been given leave to remain. This new information has allowed him to submit an appeal.

A tutor asked for very simple books in Urdu to use with a teenage girl recently arrived from Afghanistan who has never been to school and who spoke no English. Board books proved to be a successful way of starting communication with the girl and the tutor then moved on to using dual language books with her. The tutor came in to the library recently to report that the girl had made such good progress that she has secured a school place for this September.

Libraries Reaching Out

Suffolk Libraries has a Chat and Chill group which meets weekly in Ipswich County Library, for women to meet and make new friends. Over 17 languages are spoken and staff help the women who come to learn English and acquire basic skills, using the medium of crafts and conversation. They have made bunting for special occasions, shared recipes and patterns. About 25 women come every time and it's helped them build relationships and confidence.

Swansea Libraries are using their spaces as donations centres, for the public to bring in much needed supplies for refugees, including tents, sleeping bags, clothing, shoes, soap and blankets.

Bolton Libraries liaise with ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) providers who teach in the library meeting rooms, and the library provides lists of other ESOL providers & classes in Bolton. Bolton Libraries is supplying ACIS (formerly Starting Point) with dual language Bookstart books and meeting with the local Refugee Action in order to discuss tours of library for groups of their clients.

For all enquiries please contact:

Elizabeth Elford

elizelford@gmail.com

Mob: (44) 7891 056114

Notes for Editors

The Society of Chief Librarians (SCL) is a local government association made up of the chief librarian of each library authority in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. SCL takes a leading role in the development of public libraries, through sharing best practices, advocating for continuous improvement on behalf of local people, and leading the debate on the future of the public library service. www.goscl.com

ASCEL – the Association of Senior Children’s and Education Librarians – is the national membership network of senior managers in children’s and young people’s public library services and school library services in the UK.

Our aim is to lead excellence in library services for children and young people and schools so that:

- every child and young person visiting a public library should be inspired by an exciting environment which makes reading for pleasure irresistible
- every school has access to a high quality school library service.