Serving Refugees in the Public Library Setting

About Refugees

Refugee: Per the 1951 Refugee Commission, a refugee is someone who "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is *outside the country of his nationality*, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country" (UNHCR, p.1, http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646c125.html)

Refugee Camp: Stateless, transitory camps in countries neighboring those from which refugees are fleeing. Usually house thousands of people in a small area and are intended to provide only basic human needs for a short about of time. Though they are meant to provide temporary shelter, many people may reside in refugee camps for years or decades waiting for placement or repatriation.

After fleeing persecution and then residing in a refugee camp, refugees face three options:

Voluntary repatriation: the return of a refugee to his/her former country when conditions have improved and safety and basic rights are attainable.

Local integration: Integration involves settlement and integration into the country to which the person first sought asylum based on an agreement with this nation.

Resettlement: Resettlement is the objective only when there is no other way to guarantee legal or physical security of a refugee. It is the last resort and involves a third migration to a country such as the United States. Only around 1% of global refugees are granted resettlement into a third country.

Refugee is a legal status obtained *prior to resettlement* to another country. Refugees are among the **forcibly displaced.** Other forcibly displaced persons include:

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs): IDPs are those who have been forcibly uprooted due to persecution or natural disaster* and are displaced *within their own country*.

Asylum-seekers: Individuals who have fled from their home countries and claim to be refugees but apply for refugee status from within the country to which they have fled.

Per the UNHCR, the current number of forcibly displaced worldwide is 51.2 million.

*Of note- refugee status is not granted to individuals fleeing their country due to natural disaster

One of the best strategies for serving refugees is to start by increasing your own awareness and that of your staff.

Strategies for Libraries

Collaboration

Reach out to your local **VOLAG**- the primary support agency for refugees in the area- and develop a partnership.

Know your community's support web. (VOLAG, human services organizations, translation services, legal advocates, medical providers, schools, food banks, individual volunteers, support groups, etc).

Think creatively! For instance- in 2014 Whitehall Library in PA partnered with a local artist for an exhibit with local refugee portraits and stories.

Prompt others to join the support network. ***Advocate and raise awareness.***

Direct Service & Space

Tailor services already provided such as orientation to the library, information access, computer access and guidance, job finding assistance, and classes on subjects like English as a Second Language (ESL), civics, and technology to the needs of refugees in your community. For example, partner with other local supports to provide orientations to the library in other languages- see Pima County Libraries' "Welcome to the Library" videos.

Provide a welcoming environment and space with consideration to the needs of refugees and new immigrants. Make use of the library space as a location and for promotion of cultural events, public discussions, and exhibits. Remember **World Refugee Day!**

Collection Development

Raise awareness and promote global consciousness with books that present refugee stories. (see book lists resources in find out more section)

Diversify your collection.

Conduct a community needs assessment and provide informational and entertainment resources for the refugee population. Examples could include orientation guides, reference services/maps, cultural guides, advocacy group list, referral contacts, healthcare guides, a list of translation services, packets of application forms, directional information, English language learning sources including picture dictionaries, entertainment and leisure reading of their own linguistic and cultural background, resources on finding and communicating with lost relatives, etc.

References for this handout

Brathwaite, T. (2007). New issues in refugee research: refugees and asylum seekers in the Caribbean region: library service implications. *UNHCR Research Paper No. 142.* Retrieved from http://www.unhcr.org/46791a622.pdf

Hackie, S. (2014). Exhibit at Whitehall library captures refugee stories. *TribLive.* Retrieved from http://triblive.com/neighborhoods/yoursouthhills/yoursouthhillsmore/6507465-74/whitehall-exhibit-refugees#axzz3tSnQqRqo

Pima County Library. (2013). *Welcome to the library- English.* Retrieved December 2, 2015 from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NwKsrJA-X70#t=42

Seattle Public Library. (2011). *The Seattle public library honors World Refugee Day June 19.* Retrieved December 2, 2015 from https://www.spl.org/about-the-library/library-news-releases/world-refugee-day-619

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). (2015a). *Figures at a glance.* Retrieved December 6, 2015 from http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646c11.html

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). (2015b). *Refugees: flowing across borders.* Retrieved December 6, 2015 from http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646c11c.html

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). (2015c). *The 1951 Refugee Convention.* Retrieved December 6, 2015 from http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646c11c.html

Wonder, V. and Naficy, H. (2011). *Refugees 101.* [Video file]. Retrieved December 5,2015 from https://www.webjunction.org/events/webjunction/Refugees_101.html