

## Academic Libraries North EDI Innovation Fund

### Case study: Library access and support for local refugee and asylum seeker groups

Project team:

#### **Lancaster University (LU):**

Lesley English (Head of Library Engagement), Bob Frost (Faculty Librarian Science & Technology) & Nina Jones (Library Services Assistant)

#### **University of Cumbria (UoC):**

Tom Langridge (Library & Student Enquiry Point Co-ordinator), James Stephens (Head of Library Services and University Librarian), Jane Robinson (Library and Learning Spaces Manager)

In October 2022 Lancaster University Library and the University of Cumbria partnered to support Asylum seekers and Refugees (AS&R) in the Lancaster & Morecambe District, working with three charities and groups that interact with AS&R in the local area: [Global Link](#), [East meets West](#): a cross-cultural group of women; and the Ukrainian Hub.

Library support for the community was being considered at both libraries separately as part of their involvement at a university level working towards being awarded University of Sanctuary status. With connections already established between the two universities, when the call for submissions for the ALN EDI Innovation Fund was announced, we started to chat about how we could partner to support the community locally.

#### Background

At Lancaster our work in providing library support for the ASR community began in Spring 2022 when Lesley was invited to be on the Steering Group for the University of Sanctuary application, and connections with community groups locally were established both through attending events to recognise Refugee Week, and through connections with colleagues at the university already working in this area.

During Refugee Week Lancaster arranged a library staff development seminar from colleagues at Global Link Lancaster, a charity providing support, advice and information to asylum seekers and refugees, and as a wider team we started to think about how we could get involved. We had launched the Library Community card in August 2021, and so our first thoughts were to go out to a drop-in session running in the city centre, where we were welcomed with an



1 Visit to Global Link, July 2022

amazing lunch, and shared information about community access. We had a small group interested in finding academic articles, either as they wanted to go on to study in HE in the UK, or wanted to keep up their professional development, having come from careers in medicine and engineering in their home country.

From the drop-in, Bob made a connection with the manager of the ESOL courses at Global Link, and a visit to Lancaster University campus was arranged in July 2022, with 20 ESOL students attending. A cross-library group supported the event including Faculty Librarians and Library Service Advisers. There was a tour of campus & of the library, they were supported in filling out the online form to get a Community card, we helped them to search for physical books and open access resources, and we canvassed them for what resources would be useful for them. We wanted to reciprocate the sharing of food that we were welcomed to at Global Link and provided hot food and enjoyed lunch together. Most of all, they wanted to chat, to use their English language, talking about football, food and their careers back home



*2 Visit to Lancaster University Library, July 2022*

Following on from the visit, we approached East meets West, a female only group in the city, and Lesley and a female colleague attended, again for lunch. We took books from our study skills and children's collection, and there was interest in joining the library from a small group.

#### Barriers to access

Challenges of offering community access and visits to campus for community groups were quickly identified. As Lancaster University is 3 ½ miles outside of the city centre, transport was going to be a challenge. The AS&R community are given £45 per person per week for living costs by the government, therefore paying for transport to travel to either university is not sustainable.

For the first visit we agreed with the Library Director that we would pay transport costs but were unable to source any taxi firms with minibuses available on the day, so paid £240 for a coach company for the group of 20 for the return trip. We knew this was going to be a barrier to access and have had conversations with colleagues at different levels of seniority, and we need to evidence demand.

And this is when we saw the call out for the ALN EDI Innovation Fund. This fund would allow us to provide bus travel for individuals and groups to be able to use library facilities and access collections at both institutions ([StageCoach Bay Day Rider](#) costs £5.00 per ticket).

#### Partnership working

A small project group was set up in January 2023, including six colleagues from both universities. Our objectives were to:

- Provide community access and borrowing rights for both libraries for those from the AS&R community hoping to progress to HE study or needing to convert their existing qualifications in the UK;
- Develop the [Sanctuary Collection](#), a community collection of print books which includes titles supporting English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), in partnership with the AS&R community and the MA TESOL programme team at LU;
- Co-create a [LibGuide](#) providing links and information about using both libraries, open access resources and literature searching guidance;
- Support the development of information literacy skills for the community through training sessions by library staff.



3 Sanctuary Collection at LU Library



4 Sanctuary Collection at UoC Library

The ALN funding would provide transport costs to be able to continue to offer group visits to campus, as well as for individuals to use the library at a time convenient to them. The other objectives have been achieved through internal library funding.

We have met regularly, mostly on Teams, and have enjoyed our in-person catch-ups. We involve colleagues from across our library and learning development teams, and we have achieved what we initially set out to do, and exceeded these objectives.

The partnership has brought together two institutions who are working to support AS&R, sharing resources and good practice. We feel that these collaborations have fostered a deeper understanding of the AS&R community and the challenges they face in their host countries, and have also supported the community locally in encouraging a sense of belonging.

## Engagement

Engagement with the community, charities supporting the community, and council services have included:

- 2 visits to Global Link, Lancaster;
- 2 group visits to Global Link campus visits to LU Library;
- Visit to East Meets West, Lancaster;
- East Meets West visit to LU Library for International Women's Day event;
- Attendance at the Ukraine Hub, Lancaster;
- Attending Refugee Week events in the city (2 events)
- Attending County of Sanctuary event (Preston)
- Presentation to the City of Sanctuary group
- Collaboration with 2 LU student interns researching support for prospective & current students from a Sanctuary background
- Librarians from both universities attended the 'Learn and Lunch Around the World 'at St Thomas' Church in Lancaster during refugee week on 21/06/23 to promote the library offer.

**Would you like to join our Libraries?**

- ESOL workbooks
- Leisure reading
- Friendly space to study
- More than half a million books across both libraries

Library | Lancaster University

University of CUMBRIA

5 Pop-up banner taken to external events



6 Refugee Week event (our banner on the far-left)

## Reflections

Looking at the project 8-months in, we have reflected on our experiences of working with the AS&R community, and charities supporting the community.

The community, and colleagues supporting the charities, have bigger, more pressing concerns than visiting the Library, and so communications can go quiet for long periods. We need to remember this and be here to pick up the conversation when they are ready.

In developing services and library support we need to engage with the community, we should not anticipate what their needs are.

Going forward, transport costs still remain a challenge, and we need to explore other funding sources to support group and individual visits to campus. We need to evidence our work in this area

## Future plans

Our immediate and longer-term plans include:

- Developing a partnership with the city's public library service, they offer so much for the community, and it would be good to have conversations about how we can work together;
- Widen the offer, working with other universities in the north to mirror this support (which is where ALN could come in!)
- Lancaster University Library and University of Cumbria Library to meet termly to sustain the collaboration and keep the conversation ongoing.