

## **Museums, libraries and archives - supporting new communities and responding to migration trends**

The demographics of our cities and towns are shifting. Figures from the Office of National Statistics<sup>1</sup> show that the trend is towards England becoming more ethnically diverse. Data for March 2007 to March 2008 indicates that, during this time, 13.4% of people of working age who were employed in England were born outside of the United Kingdom<sup>2</sup>. During the same period, the number of people claiming asylum in Britain jumped by 16%<sup>3</sup>. These changes mean that local authorities are feeling the pressure in terms of providing appropriate services and in supporting and encouraging community cohesion between new and existing communities.

Museums, libraries and archives are ideally placed to support new communities and to meet many of their needs. Libraries act as hubs of information, where people can come to find out about local services and opportunities to get involved in their local community. Cornwall County Council, has produced an extensive [information pack for migrant workers](#), which signposts local libraries as information points, places to find English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes and places to access foreign language books.

Many library services are accepting the challenge to meet the needs of new communities by adapting their offer. [Cumbria library service](#) has been cited by the Audit Commission as an example of good practice for its work in addressing the needs of Eastern European migrant workers. It has provided extra internet services, expanded the collection of foreign books and promoted learning about Eastern European culture within the local community in order to increase inter-cultural understanding.

Innovative programmes such as [Welcome to Your Library](#) have set the standard for local authorities in engaging with new communities. This four year project aimed to increase opportunities for active engagement and participation by refugee communities in public library service planning and delivery. The legacy of this project includes web-based resources to support work with new communities and [The Network](#), which provides regular email updates relating to the work of museums, libraries and archives in tackling social exclusion.

Active engagement leads not only to improved services and increased participation levels, but also to positive community outcomes around cohesion and empowerment. Getting involved in local services through volunteering initiatives such as [Camden's Refugee Work Experience Placement Programme](#), undertaken as part of Welcome to Your Library can have multiple benefits for the service and the participants. The project aimed to increase library usage by refugee communities and equip the volunteers with skills which would help them to gain employment.

Museums, libraries and archives undertake audience development work to identify and address the barriers to participation faced by particular groups. Audience development includes marketing, community involvement in the planning and delivery of services and partnership working with third sector groups. It also often

---

<sup>1</sup> Office for National Statistics Population Estimates by Ethnic Group: 2001-2006 Commentary

<sup>2</sup> Office for National Statistics Annual Population Survey April 2007-March 2008

<sup>3</sup> Home Office Asylum Statistics: 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter 2007 compared with 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter 2008

includes re-interpretation of museum and archive collections, with the aim of finding new ways of understanding and different perspectives. The [Revisiting Collections](#) methodology has been developed by MLA London and the Collections Trust to support museums and archives to work with experts and community groups in order to establish and share new understandings of their collections. This not only leads to widened participation, but can also build understanding and tolerance between different groups by providing an insight into their respective cultures and histories.

The sector also provides opportunities for people to explore and celebrate their roots and the migratory journeys of their families. [Moving Here](#) records and explores why people have come to live in England over the past 200 years and what their experiences were and continue to be. It is a partnership project lead by The National Archives and formed from a consortium of 30 archives, libraries and museums which contributed material to a catalogue of 200,000 items between 2005-2007. The project created a digital archive which supports delivery of the national curriculum and increases cultural understanding between different groups through the sharing of personal stories relating to migration and identity.

Initiatives and approaches such as these contribute to success under a number of targets in the National Indicator Set for Local Government<sup>4</sup>. These include:

- NI 1 - % of people who believe people from different backgrounds get on well together in their local area;
- NI 2 - % of people who believe that they belong to their neighbourhood;
- NI 4 - % of people who feel that they can influence decisions in their locality;
- NI 6 – participation in regular volunteering;
- NI 9 – use of public libraries;
- NI 10 – visits to museums and galleries;
- NI 13 – migrants' English Language skills and knowledge;
- NI 23 – perceptions that people in the area treat one another with respect and dignity;
- NI 72-NI 109 – contribution to the National Curriculum under Children and Young People, Enjoy and Achieve;
- NI 110 – positive activities for young people; and
- NI 151 – over-all employment rate.

Further examples of good practice include:

- [Leicester: Legacy of Partition](#) – 'The Legacy of Partition 1947-1948: Relations between Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs in 1947-8 and in the UK today' is funded by the MLA and Big Lottery Fund Their Past Your Future 2 grant programme. Leicester Libraries have created an oral history archive of experiences of Partition explored historical and contemporary attitudes.
- [Renaissance London Refugee Heritage Project](#) – Between 2004-2006, the London Museums Hub worked with four museums in London with strong track records in community outreach to empower refugee communities to identify, record and preserve important elements of their heritage.

---

<sup>4</sup> [National Indicators for Local Authorities and Local Authority Partnerships, The Department for Communities and Local Government](#) (May 2008)

- [Connecting Histories](#) – Connecting Histories is Birmingham-based digital archive which includes archive material collected by and from a variety of communities, including work with refugees and asylum seekers.
- [North Yorkshire Libraries](#) – In September 2008, as part of the National Year of Reading, North Yorkshire Libraries celebrated cultural, personal and local identity. Libraries across the county promoted the collections they are developing to support an increasingly multi-cultural population.
- [The Immigrants Project](#) – This project has collected, stored and disseminated stories and experiences of people who came to settle in Reading through of community research and interviews. The material is held by the Museum of Reading as an archive.
- [Lincolnshire New Arrivals Project: Just like mother used to make](#) – In 2008, as part of a programme of support for new communities, the Access Team worked in partnership with Ayscoughfee Hall Museum and Renaissance East Midlands to bring local people and new communities together on a project based around foods that help recall childhood memories.
- [Refugee Stories \(Refugees Community History Project\)](#) – This project collected the stories of refugees who have settled in London since 1951 in order to highlight the contributions they make to the city. Over 150 refugees from 15 different groups have took part and the Museum of London ran an exhibition based on the work and archived all of the related material.
- [Renaissance London: Untold London](#) - Untold London is a collaborative project managed by the London Museums Hub. The website explores the histories that relate to all the people of London as they are told in museums, galleries, archives and community heritage organisations.
- [Building Bolton: New Communities](#) – Building Bolton: Up Your Street is an exhibition running at Bolton Museum, exploring local history and identity. New Communities is one element of the exhibition and looks at some of the reasons why people have chosen to make Bolton their home and how areas have change to reflect these new groups.

You can find out more about how museums, libraries and archives support community cohesion and empowerment by exploring the [case studies](#) on the MLA Research Website.

**Jennifer Ngyou, Policy Adviser: Communities and Local Government  
Museums, Libraries and Archives Council  
February 2009**