

REFORMA'S CHILDREN IN CRISIS IMMIGRATION TOOLKIT FOR LIBRARIES

With the large number of immigrants arriving into the United States from Central American and other regions libraries will be called on to offer more diverse services. It's critical that libraries present a welcoming environment where these new arrivals will feel a sense of belonging. Many of these refugees have fled dangerous situations and many have no concept of what services a library can provide. It is incumbent on library staff at all levels to rethink how we offer services and to be flexible in how they address the needs of users who are sometimes still living in social service shelters as they attempt to be reunified with family members here in the U.S.

REFORMA has been working with the Children in Crisis project since the Summer 2014 and we have discovered a number of "tips" that we think might help in serving the refugee community and in particular the Children in Crisis who have arrived as unaccompanied minors. Please review the "tips" below and should you encounter a refugee child in your library, please attempt to help them learn about the positive impact libraries can have on their lives at so many levels. If you have questions about how to better serve these communities or how to get more involved, please contact the REFORMA Co-Chairs of the Children in Crisis project at: <http://refugeechildren.wix.com/refugee-children#!contact-us/c1z0xz>

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES:

- Create and maintain a list of pro bono lawyers and/or legal services and local support groups for the refugee community.
- Provide library tours in their languages for refugees/immigrants or the administrators of the shelters that house them.
- Make contact with detention centers, group homes and refugee shelters for asylum seekers. Work with staff at these facilities to determine their needs.
- Work with local religious and legal defense organizations that interact with the immigrant community to better identify opportunities to serve refugees and to support these organizations in their work.
- Offer tours for refugee/immigrant community members who may not have been in a library before, acquainting them with all the services offered at your library and offering them library cards.
- Provide citizenship classes in multiple languages.
- Create and support portable libraries within the refugee and immigration centers so that the children have increased access to books where they are being housed.
- Offer English language courses and/or English conversational classes (often led by volunteers).
- Display "Welcome" signs, library activities and other information throughout the library in the languages spoken by the immigrant communities.

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- Hire bilingual, bicultural library staff. Recruit bilingual volunteers. Make a telephone list of library staff members who speak other languages.
- Smile, sincerely. You will be speaking the universal language of kindness.
- Assume no prior knowledge of libraries or lending policies.
- Provide library card application forms and orientation materials in the refugees' native languages.
- Learn how to retrieve foreign language materials and resources at your library – what search terms to use in your library's catalog, i.e., SUBJECT: Spanish Language Materials.
- Know the holidays and festivals celebrated in the immigrant communities. Create displays to acknowledge and commemorate these.
- Contact your state, local, municipal and social service agencies; ask for information materials printed in other languages for public distribution. Locate online resources offering other language information, such as the Internal Revenue Service, Bureau of Motor Vehicles, etc.
- Get to know the community newspaper editor or reporters of other language weeklies: They can provide free newspapers and translate and publish your program calendar in the paper's community calendar.
- Provide links and information about other community organizations and resources that can help refugees on their journey.
- When working on library events like summer reading programs, remember that some of these children may be moving on before the program ends. Consider conducting an Offsite Summer Reading Program where you provide the prizes to the shelter and shelter staff monitors the program and award prizes to youth.
- If you are working with children in a temporary shelter situation attempt to help them locate the public library that will be local to them when they are reunified with their family here in the U.S.
- Work with the educators at the shelters to get an idea of what genres of books are being requested and what the reading levels are for the children in their facility. Find out what their curriculum needs are and how you can best assist them to maintain a flexible curriculum for youth coming and going from the shelter.
- Hold book donation drives for refugees in your community in their native languages. In particular request bilingual publications that will allow them to enjoy their native tongue at the same time that they are learning English.

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- Highlight opportunities for your community members to donate money, books or time to helping to welcome refugees to your community. Seek grant opportunities available that can assist with funding for purchasing books that refugee youth can take with them or can be part of an “honor system” collection.
- Make community space available for refugee children to interact with local youth to discuss their different experiences.
- Create guides to social and government services that refugees will find useful in your community.
- Open local dialogs with community and government agencies providing services to the refugee community so that we can provide more visibility for their services and so that those agencies become more aware of the role that libraries can play in orienting refugees to our community.
- Create opportunities for refugees to talk about and present their homelands to local users.
- Connect refugees with mentors in the community who can assist them.
- Create “programs in a box” in multiple languages that can be implemented during visits from or to refugee/immigrant youth shelters.
- If a camera and printer is available, take pictures of youth visiting the library and print them out for them to take a copy of their picture with them. Oftentimes refugee/immigrant youth housed in shelters don't have many personal belongings and having a photo of themselves or with their peers is a memory they can take with them. **Please be aware of privacy and security issues and ask refugee/immigrant youth and shelter leaders if this is ok to do prior to taking any pictures.**

SOURCES:

Denver Library – Services to New Immigrants
<https://www.denverlibrary.org/services-immigrants>

How to Serve the World at Your Library – ALA Publication
<http://www.ala.org/offices/olos/toolkits/servetheworld/servetheworldhome>

Library Services for Refugees and Asylum Seekers
<https://www.goethe.de/en/kul/bib/20622325.html>

Omaha Public Library reaching out to new immigrants and refugees
http://www.omaha.com/news/goodnews/omaha-public-library-reaching-out-to-new-immigrants-and-refugees/article_f43ae9cb-2e24-5dd7-931e-092519f4faa3.html

Public Libraries in Europe Welcome Refugees
<http://www.eblida.org/special-event.html>

Welcoming Refugees to the UK (and to Libraries)
<http://www.cilip.org.uk/blog/welcoming-refugees-uk-libraries>