



# Libraries and Museums of Sanctuary

Around the world, more people than ever are forced to flee conflict and persecution to find safety and sanctuary elsewhere. On arrival in the UK, many asylum seekers and refugees are already traumatised; they are then dispersed to cities across the UK.

People seeking sanctuary are among the most disadvantaged groups in our communities. Socially isolated, suffering verbal and physical harassment, they live in fear, not knowing what will happen to them. They face problems concerned with poverty, housing, work, education, health and a low awareness of their rights.

City of Sanctuary UK supports a network in over 100 towns, cities, boroughs and villages. Our vision is that the UK will be a welcoming place of safety for all and, in particular, to offer sanctuary to people fleeing violence and persecution. The network is spread across the UK, working towards this vision through every sphere of society across the voluntary, public and private sectors.

City of Sanctuary invites organisations across the voluntary, public and private sectors to contribute to a culture of welcome by following three straightforward processes:

- **Learn** about what it means to be seeking sanctuary.
- Take positive action to **embed** concepts of welcome, safety and inclusion within the context of the organisation and the wider community.
- **Share** your vision and achievements

In this way we have developed a wide network of places of sanctuary, including schools, colleges and universities, health centres, sports clubs, centres, theatres, community gardens, cafés and others.

We are pleased for libraries and museums to join the network; we recognise their value in welcoming vulnerable groups, especially new arrivals from diverse communities.





**Libraries and Museums** are open and accessible community spaces with well-trained staff, sensitive to inclusion and access issues. They celebrate cultural diversity through arts, historical objects, books, other printed resources and media, and reach out to diverse communities to meet their needs and interests. Museums help to educate all communities about local and/or global history providing space for shared learning and understanding between diverse communities. Thoughtful curation can help to engender a sense of belonging and affirmation for groups which may have been marginalised.

The resources designed to connect asylum seekers, refugees and other new arrivals to their local library by the Welcome to Your library project are available at [www.welcometoyourlibrary.org.uk](http://www.welcometoyourlibrary.org.uk) and updated at <https://www.seapn.org.uk/topics/migration/welcome-to-your-library>

## What Do Museums and Libraries of Sanctuary Offer?

A Library or Museum of Sanctuary will be recognised by the local City of Sanctuary network for following the 3 processes of learn, embed and share. Each library/museum will have its own unique contribution but, in general, they will:

- **contribute to stronger, resilient communities working in partnership with community groups and others**
- **act as a medium of positive communication between sanctuary-seekers, migrant groups and local communities, using displays, events and networks**
- **provide free internet, information, access to local and national government services and signpost to other helpful agencies**
- **promote local support organisations and opportunities to join in their activities**
- **use displays and the example of their staff to promote respect and welcome to sanctuary-seekers among all their users**
- **bring communities and cultures together through storytelling and other events**
- **provide space for English classes, conversation clubs, community language and reading support**
- **support local initiatives to bring the needs of sanctuary-seekers to the attention of other sections of the community through meetings, social events, exhibitions, or other means**
- **provide volunteering opportunities and spaces for bringing people together and sharing experience**
- **collect and exhibit objects which tell relevant stories with the potential for promoting community cohesion**

## Thimblemill Library

Thimblemill Library in the borough of Sandwell has provided a home for Bearwood Action for Refugees. This community group of volunteers work with local grassroots organisations to help support refugees and asylum seekers living locally, raise awareness of the issues they face and improve access to services and inclusion in all aspects of community life. The library provides space and support for the group and its initiatives including fundraising, training courses, and a befriending project. Staff are skilled and understanding, and welcome people seeking sanctuary and newcomers into all their services. The library also provides for an asylum seeker to provide free ESOL classes 3 days a week. The library staff and resident storyteller are committed to and passionate about the telling of stories including those of refugees, really valuing their contribution to the local community and creating a culture of welcome and inclusion. Sandwell Borough Council is now committed to creating Libraries of Sanctuary across the borough, as a result of Thimblemill Library's successful application for the Library of Sanctuary award.

## Leicester New Walk Museum

A member of the Collections Team led a major project, 'The Whole World Paints' with people seeking sanctuary. They were invited to select works of art from the museum collections to be displayed in the World Arts Gallery, and to record their personal responses to the world artworks as a key element of the exhibition. New Walk Museum has also provided "Museum Take-Over" days in partnership with Journeys Festival International (a Festival of Sanctuary) at which there have been speakers, performances and arts and crafts activities led by migrants as well as museum staff, and at which asylum seekers and refugees have had an opportunity to have a voice to read their poems and creative writing. During the 2018 Refugee Week the Outreach Officer worked in partnership with members of the Creative Writing Group at Leicester City of Sanctuary to write new labels to express their response to objects on display in the world arts gallery. This provided an opportunity to reinterpret objects which they had recognised from their countries of origin based on their personal experience. This led to the production of an online resource, <https://bit.ly/2VMIOUC>

## Manchester Museum

In 2017 Manchester Museum's curator of archaeology visited the island of Lesbos, Greece to collect a refugee life jacket and interview a number of people on the island that were helping refugees. The jacket with the stories collected formed part of the Museums contemporary collecting project which was around the theme of migration.

The life jacket was displayed in the museums to highlight some of the refugee experiences and the work being carried out in Greece and the UK.





### Norfolk

In October 2016, Norwich's iconic Millennium Library became home to a new social work service for migrants and refugees in the form of the People from Abroad Team. See:

<https://bit.ly/2KnwUgx> pp37-38

### Nottingham

Nottingham Libraries run Conversation Groups for anyone who wants to improve their confidence in speaking English. They are aimed at people whose first language is not English and help build confidence by discussion, debate, exchanging ideas and through activities and tasks. They also run The Language Café, an informal language exchange and fun way to learn new languages or practice your teaching skills. See:

<https://bit.ly/2ZQPWxq>

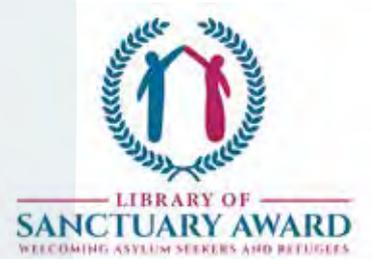
There is scope for museums and libraries to become places of sanctuary and make a positive difference to the lives of refugees and asylum seekers. If you work in a museum or library and would like to engage with us or discuss further information please contact:

[info@cityofsanctuary.org](mailto:info@cityofsanctuary.org)

See [www.cityofsanctuary.org](http://www.cityofsanctuary.org)

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The new book '**A Hundred Thousand Welcomes**' by Tiffy Allen, brings to life the story of City of Sanctuary providing a useful introduction to the vision of welcome and inclusion and the issues affecting people seeking asylum.

You can order your copy from **Lulu Bookshop**: <https://bit.ly/2JckqUN>



City of Sanctuary