

Brighton & Hove Libraries: The Network of International Women Brighton

The Network of International Women Brighton provides a platform for women from different cultures and backgrounds to meet, share experience and knowledge and support one another.

Brighton & Hove Libraries have developed their partnership with the group over the past 2.5 years. At the library, the Network meet weekly to sew, make crafts, get information, support and make friends. They also practise their English through conversation and translate for each other if there is a communications barrier. The most successful and impactful activity to date has been the creation of the 'Illuminate Tapestry' where the women explored ideas of identity and belonging. Weekly sewing sessions in the library have enabled women to tell their stories, develop friendships, gain new insights, and enhance a sense of belonging, self-confidence and achievement.

During Refugee Week 2019, the Library Service consulted with customers on the service becoming a Library of Sanctuary – they did this at Refugee Week events at The Dome in the centre of the city, at the Network of International Women's sewing group in the library, and in the foyer of the library to catch all customers. They explored a number of questions with an interactive display board and through a facilitated workshop with the Network; the questions that were explored were:

- What does Sanctuary mean to you?
- What would a Library of Sanctuary mean or look like to you?
- Do you feel this library offers sanctuary and if so how?
- How can we improve?

The workshop finished with the women designing a Library of Sanctuary banner, performances of poetry and songs read by women in their home languages, and a wonderful lunch to which some of the women contributed dishes. The Library banner, which took 3 months to complete, was presented to Brighton & Hove Libraries in December, making a statement to the city that they are working towards becoming a Library of Sanctuary and they want to be welcoming and inclusive to all, particularly people seeking sanctuary.