

LIBRARIES/BUILDING/COMMUNITIES

THE VITAL CONTRIBUTION OF VICTORIA'S PUBLIC LIBRARIES – A RESEARCH REPORT
FOR THE LIBRARY BOARD OF VICTORIA AND THE VICTORIAN PUBLIC LIBRARY NETWORK

Connecting with the Community **Part C: Horn of Africa communities**

This report is one of five sections of the full **Connecting with the Community** report. The full report is available from the State Library of Victoria website: www.slv.vic.gov.au



Library Board
of Victoria



The original *Libraries Building Communities* reports were published in 2005. The reports presented the findings of the first comprehensive Australian study of the value public libraries add to their communities. The study was designed to provide information that would assist in the planning of public library services and in advocacy efforts on behalf of public libraries. It included all 44 public library services in Victoria and drew on the views of nearly 10,000 Victorians. There are four reports with an *Executive Summary*:

- Report One: *Setting the Scene* covers the concept of community building, the Victorian Government's policy agenda, the Victorian public library network, project methodology and relevant research.
- Report Two: *Logging the Benefits* outlines community views on the role and benefits of public libraries.
- Report Three: *Bridging the Gaps* provides socio-demographic profiles of library users and non-users and strategies of bridging the perceived gaps in public library service delivery.
- Report Four: *Showcasing the Best* gives over thirty examples of innovation and excellence in Victorian public libraries.

In 2006, the research continued with the *Libraries Building Communities* Library User Census and Survey Project and publication of a further two reports from this research:

- Report One: *Statewide Analysis and Comparisons*
- Report Two: *Library Services Data and Reports*

In 2007, further qualitative research was undertaken with five groups identified in the 2005 reports as 'hard to reach' for public libraries: indigenous Australians; disadvantaged young people; Horn of Africa communities; low income families; and, vulnerable learners. The outcomes of this research and ideas for engaging these groups are contained in the *Connecting with the Community* report.

In 2007, a second volume of case studies of some of the many innovative and excellent programs offered by Victorian public libraries that strengthen their communities was compiled. These are published in *Libraries Building Communities* Report Four: *Showcasing the Best, Volume 2*.

All publicly available reports related to the *Libraries Building Communities* project are available via the State Library of Victoria website: www.slv.vic.gov.au

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Published May 2008 by
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ISBN 978 0 646 48644 4

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Introduction

The concern is that, among the 40% not using [public] libraries, there are people who are hard to reach but who would benefit enormously from what the library has to offer ... data indicates that about 13% of Victorians fall into this category.

STATE LIBRARY OF VICTORIA 2005B, P. 6

Libraries Building Communities (LBC) is a Statewide Public Library Development Project of the Library Board of Victoria undertaken through the State Library of Victoria and the Victorian public library network. Its aim is to convey to decision makers, and others, the breadth, depth and potential impact of the modern public library on the whole community.

LBC research shows that about 60% of Victorians use public library services. Of the remainder, a significant proportion give 'lifestyle' reasons for not using the library. A smaller proportion, representing about 13% of Victorians, have potentially much to gain from using library services but face considerable barriers in accessing and using these services. This group includes both people from marginalised social groups whose access to information and technology is severely limited, and people who face special difficulties in using the library (e.g. those who are housebound).

To provide a clearer picture of these 'hard-to-reach' groups, the Connecting with the Community research project has collected qualitative information about their characteristics and barriers to participation. The project report also suggests practical strategies and recommendations for meeting the specific needs of these groups.

Through discussion with the LBC Workgroup, comprising representatives of the State Library of Victoria and Victoria's public library services, the Connecting with the Community project chose to research five target groups within the population:

- Indigenous Australians
- Disadvantaged young people
- Horn of Africa communities
- Low-income families
- Vulnerable learners

The research does not suggest that all members of these population groups face barriers in accessing and using public library services. Some people within these groups are regular and passionate library users. Nor does the research suggest that these groups fully account for the 13% of Victorians who may be marginalised in their

access to information. Other groups might have been chosen.

These groups were selected on the basis that they represented populations who were thought to significantly underuse available library services. The more that public libraries know about the nature of these groups – their information needs, the factors that influence their access of information, the examples of library programs implemented in Victoria, Australia and overseas – the greater the opportunity for existing library services to be enhanced to better meet the needs of all members of the community. It is hoped that in time the proportion of Victorians who have much to gain from using library services but face barriers in accessing and using these services might no longer be 13%, but 10% or 5%, or even lower.

Research methods

I&J Management Services has worked with the State Library of Victoria and the Victorian public library network on several aspects of the Libraries Building Communities project. In 2007, it was engaged to undertake the Connecting with the Community research project.

Selection of target groups

In planning the research, the LBC Workgroup discussed potential criteria for selection of the hard-to-reach target groups that would be the focus of the project. Five broad criteria were thought to balance the arguments for and against targeting different population groups:

- **Universality** – The population target group and the findings related to that target group are relevant to the majority of Victorian public libraries.
 - **Real benefits** – The target group is likely to be interested in and benefit from access to public library services.
 - **Policy connectedness** – The target group corresponds with groups identified as socially excluded and identified as target groups in Commonwealth, state and local government policy statements.
 - **Research efficiency** – The target group is not the subject of similar research already being done in the public library system, thereby avoiding duplication of effort.
 - **Coverage** – The target group should represent a significant proportion of the 13% of Victorians in the hard-to-reach group.
- Applying these criteria and taking in to account the knowledge, experience and input of the LBC Workgroup, it was agreed that the research would focus on the following hard-to-reach target groups:
- **Indigenous Australians** – Previous LBC research and library data indicates that Indigenous Australians are generally not frequent users of library services. However, the information, literacy, educational and computer services available through public libraries are of benefit to Indigenous Australians of all age groups, including people living in rural and urban communities. Libraries could also play a role in developing and maintaining Indigenous language and cultural records.
 - **Disadvantaged young people** – This target group includes teenagers and young people who have left school early, those who are homeless or at risk of being made homeless, those in families where parents are unemployed, and young people facing other forms of social and/or economic disadvantage.
 - **Horn of Africa communities** – Humanitarian and refugee migration programs have seen a significant influx in Victoria over recent years of migrants from Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia and Djibouti. Aside from being a target group of interest in their own right, it was thought the issues related to library access and use by this group might be shared by other and future emerging migrant communities.
 - **Low-income families with dependent children** – A range of research reports, such as *Dropping off the Edge* (Vinson 2007), has identified families with children living in economically disadvantaged areas as facing difficulties in accessing community services that could assist their economic, educational, health

and social wellbeing. This target group includes sole parents and other families dependent on Centrelink benefits.

- **Vulnerable learners** – The skills needed in the twenty-first century workplace differ from those possessed by many older workers, long-term unemployed and people with low-level skills making the transition back to employment and learning. For many men aged over 45, women without an employment history, and people with disabilities, accessing further education and acquiring information and computer skills is critical to their capacity to participate in the workforce.

Other groups that were considered by the LBC Workgroup for attention in this research included some from broad population groups such as seniors, people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, people living in rural communities, the unemployed and people with disabilities, as well as some from more specific population groups such as homeless people, housebound people, itinerant travellers and people in detention. It was thought that subject to the findings from the five selected target groups, future research might be undertaken with these or other relevant population groups.

It was also understood that both the five target groups and those groups not included in the Connecting with the Community research project are not mutually exclusive, and that there is overlap between groups (e.g. disadvantaged young people and low-income families; vulnerable learners and the unemployed). This makes it possible to develop some understanding about library use and needs among groups not targeted by this research.

Research activities

The Connecting with the Community research project comprised three stages. The first was the process outlined above, in which the LBC Workgroup selected five groups who might benefit from greater access to and use of public library services. In addition to the selection of

these target groups, the LBC Workgroup also decided on five locations in Victoria to concentrate the field-based research activities. These were chosen as areas where it was known that library users and non-users from the respective target groups lived and might be engaged to participate in the research. The following five locations covered metropolitan, urban fringe and regional areas:

- Indigenous Australians – Shepparton.
- Disadvantaged young people – northern suburbs of Melbourne (e.g. Reservoir, Darebin).
- Horn of Africa communities – western suburbs of Melbourne (e.g. Footscray, St Albans).
- Low-income families – Hastings.
- Vulnerable learners – northern suburbs of Geelong (e.g. Corio, Norlane).

The second stage of the research involved collection of information about the factors that influence the library use of people from each target group. In effect, the research was conducted as five parallel mini-research projects, each having three distinct components.

1. Literature review – This involved a short, focused review of Australian and international literature to identify relevant research into the library use of these target groups, as well as examples of practical strategies implemented by libraries to encourage greater access to and use of library services by the target groups.

2. Interviews with community stakeholders – For each target group, this involved telephone or face-to-face interviews with a small number of stakeholders from agencies engaged in providing community support to the target group. Across the five areas these stakeholders included local government officers, youth workers, social workers, community leaders, community workers from migrant resource centres, representatives from community educational providers, staff at neighbourhood houses and community centres, and personnel from the Department of Human Services' Neighbourhood Renewal projects in relevant locations (e.g. Hastings, Corio).

3. Focus group discussions with targeted groups –

Two to four focus groups were held with each selected target group to explore perceptions of, attitudes to and use of public libraries. Participants were recruited to the groups through networks of the community stakeholders (e.g. playgroups, youth groups, ethnic community associations). Participants included some people from the target groups who used public library services and some who did not (including some who were unaware of available library services). The number of participants in each group ranged from four to twenty, with in most cases eight to twelve people involved and a total of around thirty people from each target group. Focus group participants received refreshments and were reimbursed for their contribution.

The second stage of the research also involved three focus group discussions with interested staff from Victoria's public libraries. About fifty staff members took part in three separate focus groups, each in a different location and each concentrating on one or two of the selected target population groups. The aim of these focus groups was to canvass issues related to the use of libraries by the target groups, and also to identify the innovative strategies currently being adopted by Victorian public libraries to attract and engage these target groups. The three focus groups were:

- Indigenous Australians and Horn of Africa communities – East Melbourne Library.
- Disadvantaged young people and low-income families – Dandenong Library.
- Vulnerable learners – Broadmeadows Library.

The final stage of the Connecting with the Community research project was the writing of this report. The report has been structured to document the findings of the overall project and highlight the findings related to individual target groups. The introductory section of the report contains the research objectives, information on research methods, presentation of a set of Principles of User Engagement and a summary of the overall findings.

The body of the report is presented in five parts, each dedicated to one of the selected target groups. These self-contained research reports have:

- 1 A description of the selected target group.
- 2 A description of the group's primary library and information needs.
- 3 Ideas and lessons for engaging the target group from libraries in Victoria, Australia and overseas, based on the literature review, the staff focus groups and information provided by the LBC Workgroup.
- 4 Discussion of factors that can inhibit access to and use of library services by the target group.
- 5 Discussion of actions that Victorian public libraries might take to increase productive library use among the target group and build connections with the community.
- 6 References and further reading relevant to the research.

Information about strategies to engage other population groups could, if desired, also be presented as self-contained reports in this format, reflecting as these do the Principles of User Engagement described in the next section of this report.

Additional information about the individual research approaches adopted with each target group is contained in the report on each group.

Principles of user engagement

In undertaking the Libraries Building Communities Connecting with the Community research project, a number of common principles emerged that could underlie the effective engagement of hard-to-reach library users.

These principles apply to the engagement of all library users, including the general population and, within this, the selected target groups. They describe a desired outcome, not the method or process by which the outcome can be achieved (e.g. increasing engagement

Principle	
Awareness	Ensure all targeted user groups are aware of available library services.
Engagement	Create places and spaces that are accessible, inviting, engaging and comfortable for each targeted user group.
Collections, programs and services	Provide collections, programs and services that meet the library and information needs of each targeted user group.
Policies and procedures	Implement policies and procedures that maximise access to library services and allow all library users to have an enjoyable library experience.
Customer service	Ensure library staff have the motivation, capacity and resources to engage and support library users.

through provision of opportunities for users to contribute to library planning, activities and programs), as this may vary from library to library, or between user groups. The principles are provided for guidance, and are not intended as a complete recipe for widespread and effective community engagement with public libraries.

The application of these principles to each of the research target groups is discussed in the individual research reports. The principles are broadly used as the basis for discussing the library and information needs of the target groups, the factors that inhibit or constrain their use of library services, and the strategies libraries might adopt to increase community engagement.

Summary

The Libraries Building Communities initiative aims to convey to decision makers, and others, the breadth, depth and potential impact on the whole community of the modern public library. Libraries are immensely important to their communities – culturally, economically and socially:

Libraries collect and disseminate information; they provide comfortable and convenient places for people to read and learn; their physical spaces form meeting places for community groups; being free and open for all they help to create a fairer society ... [Public libraries are] highly valued by the communities they serve, and are uniquely placed to draw a diverse range of people and groups together (State Library of Victoria 2005a, p. 5).

The Connecting with the Community project has undertaken research to enable library managers and staff to better understand some marginalised and disadvantaged population groups that tend not to be library users. It is estimated that about 13% of Victorians have potentially much to gain from using libraries but face barriers in accessing and using these services. People in this group could benefit from the educational, recreational and social information resources and programs provided by Victoria's public libraries, but are unaware of or disengaged from library services. These are people from marginalised social groups whose access to information and technology is severely limited, and people who face special difficulties in using the library. These are people that libraries find hard to reach through their normal communication and networking activities.

This research is focused on collection of information that will provide a clearer picture of these hard-to-reach groups – their characteristics and barriers to participation. The report aims to suggest practical strategies and recommendations for meeting the specific needs of these groups. It also aims to enable Victoria’s public library network to enhance the capacity and connectedness of Victorian communities.

Taking into account issues of relevance, benefits, policy connectedness, coverage and research efficiency, the LBC Workgroup selected five population groups to be the target of this research:

- Indigenous Australians
- Disadvantaged young people
- Horn of Africa communities
- Low-income families
- Vulnerable learners

These groups were selected on the basis that they represented populations who were thought to significantly underuse available library services. The more that public libraries know about the nature of these groups – their information needs, the factors that influence their access of information, the examples of library programs implemented in Victoria, Australia and overseas – the greater the opportunity for existing library services to be enhanced to better meet the needs of all members of the community.

The research does not suggest that all members of these population groups face barriers in accessing and using public library services. Nor does the research suggest that these groups fully cover the 13% of Victorians who may be marginalised in their access to information. Other groups might have been chosen. The research does not provide a cure-all to the challenges faced by these groups in accessing library services, nor a complete outreach strategy for every library. The research does not anticipate that every library will implement all of the programs and initiatives referenced in this report. Like any public institution, libraries cannot be all things to all people. The research emphasises the need to distinguish the important community role of library staff from that

of a welfare or social worker. It highlights the importance of libraries working closely with community health centres, child and migrant welfare agencies and other organisations that are able to complement the work of libraries by providing this type of support.

However, it is intended that the information contained in each of the individual sections of this report will be considered by library services as they assess the profile, characteristics and service needs of their local community. It is hoped that the challenges faced by these groups are better understood, and that methods of connecting with communities can be enhanced.

- Indigenous Australians are often unaware of what libraries have to offer, and feel uncomfortable in an unfamiliar environment. But if their library were a meeting place, a centre for bringing together information about Indigenous language and culture, then young and old they would come, they would share and they would learn.
- Disadvantaged young people want access to information, access to technology, and they want it now. There is information they need for educational and employment purposes; there is information they need to access community services. Libraries could be the place they come to for that information, if libraries had spaces and environments that were inviting, comfortable and entertaining.
- Horn of Africa communities in Victoria have been displaced, and are seeking connections: connections with one another; connections with their homeland, culture and traditions; and connections with their new home. They need to know what libraries have to offer. They need to develop English language and literacy skills. They need access to computers and information technology skills. They need access to information on jobs and community services. Libraries can work with these communities and their community leaders to fulfil these needs.
- Low-income families could benefit from many existing library services if they knew what was available: storytime for children, free access to the Internet, free access to books and magazines, support for skills development, and information on community

and employment services. These families need to be encouraged to come to and experience a modern public library. They need to feel welcomed and comfortable and able to take a little time out to read and take advantage of their library.

- Vulnerable learners are on the fringe of the workforce. They need access to information on education and employment opportunities. They need to develop information, literacy and information technology skills that are becoming essential in the workplace. They need to be encouraged to be lifelong learners. Many have not been in a public library for years, and once they find out about the resources, services and programs that libraries have to offer they can start to integrate their library into their learning plans.

The Connecting with the Community research aims to be a source of information and ideas that assist libraries to improve the quality and reach of service provision to give those who stand to benefit most the chance to access and use their local library. It is intended that this information promote discussion and community engagement.

It is hoped that in time the proportion of Victorians who have much to gain from using library services but face barriers in accessing and using these services might no longer be 13%, but 10% or 5% or even lower.

References

State Library of Victoria 2005a, *Libraries Building Communities: Executive Summary*, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne.

State Library of Victoria 2005b, *Libraries Building Communities Report Three: Bridging the Gaps*, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne.

Vinson, T 2007, *Dropping off the Edge: The Distribution of Disadvantage in Australia*, Jesuit Social Services and Catholic Social Services Australia, Melbourne.

Part C: Horn of Africa communities

Not everyone comes from countries where there are institutions like public libraries. There's a huge amount of awareness-raising to be done ...

CARPENTER 2004, P. 28

C1 Horn of Africa communities

Background

In recent decades, the Horn of Africa has been a region continuously in crisis.² Political instability is standard, and the region is regularly stricken by natural catastrophes, such as droughts and floods, that hit rural areas particularly hard. It is estimated that between 1982 and 1992 some two million people died in the Horn of Africa due to a combination of war and famine (Prendergast, cited in *New Internationalist* 1992).

African settlement in Australia started in about 1984, with a 'wave' of settlement since 1999 primarily through humanitarian and refugee migration programs. By 2007, there were more than 20,000 African settlers in Victoria. Approximately 50% are from the Sudan, 22% from Ethiopia, 19% from Somalia and 9% from Eritrea (ABS 2008).³ Most, but not all, are refugees and asylum seekers.

Typical of many other new and emerging migrant groups in Victoria, people from the Horn of Africa represent a highly urbanised community. The greatest numbers currently live in public housing in the municipalities of Greater Dandenong, Moonee Valley, Maribyrnong and Brimbank. However, it is expected that over time this very high concentration of the Horn of Africa population within particular urban areas may diminish.

A large proportion of this population is under 20 years of age; there is also a significant proportion of single mothers with large families:

² For the purpose of this report, Horn of Africa countries include Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia and Djibouti. These countries have strong cultural and geographical links.

³ Information on the demographic characteristics of the Horn of Africa population in Victoria is available through a series of Community Profiles prepared by the Victorian Office of Multicultural Affairs (2001), based on the Australian Bureau of Statistics' 2001 Population Census. More up-to-date information is available from the Department of Immigration and Citizenship Settlement Database and profiles developed by migrant resource centres.

Australia has never had a stream of refugees quite like this one. In 2004–05, 56% of the African refugee intake was under 20. Violetta Walsh, director of Newcastle’s migrant resource centre, estimates that sole supporting mothers with large families (up to nine children) account for half the African community in that town (Bagnall 2006, p. 3).

There are many languages spoken in the Horn of Africa communities but the most common are Arabic (including Lebanese),⁴ Amharic, Tigrinian, Somali Dinka and Eritrean. Many people are multilingual; the Sudanese, for example, often use Arabic as a second language. Some of these languages, such as Somali, have an oral rather than a written tradition.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics’ Census captures information on religious affiliation, and at the 2001 Census the most common religious affiliation reported by the Somalian- and Eritrean-born population in Victoria was Islam. The Ethiopian-born population reported affiliation with a broader range of religions but the commonest response was Islam (about 40%). Three-quarters of the Sudanese-born reported an affiliation with Christian religions.

This report outlines the findings of the Connecting with the Community research project with respect to Horn of Africa communities.

The needs of refugees and asylum seekers

A number of research papers and presentations by representatives of the African community highlight the situation of refugees and asylum seekers in Australia (Taylor 2004) (see also section C6). These show that:

- Many have come to Australia via refugee camps and have experienced physical and mental trauma.

- Although refugees with permanent protection visas have access to a range of government services available to other permanent residents, those on temporary protection visas are not eligible for many government settlement and other support systems and do not have family reunion rights. For example, asylum seekers on bridging visas have access to fewer benefits, are not eligible for Centrelink payments, and are only eligible for Medicare if they have been given permission to work.
- The substantive issues facing these communities include employment, education, health, problem gambling and domestic violence. Some newly arrived African people do not read or write their own language due to the difficult circumstances from which they have come. Lack of language skills, training and previous work experience has contributed to the high unemployment rate.
- African–Australian youth often find themselves ‘caught between two cultures’. An important issue for the community is providing opportunities for young people to develop their confidence, independence, leadership skills and pride in their African and Australian identity.

While refugees face some similar issues to other new migrants settling in Australia, refugees generally also have distinctive issues which are not always taken into account when regional settlement is proposed. These may include the lasting impacts of pre-migration trauma and torture, of long periods in refugee camps, with disrupted education and employment and lack of health care, and the anxiety of having family still living in situations of high danger (Taylor & Stanovic 2005, pp. 5–6).

⁴ Many countries in the Horn of Africa have historical, political and trade links with Arabia and the Middle East.

The majority of refugees arriving in Australia are poor in terms of income and assets. They face many of the same day to day issues as other people living in poverty, but with an underlay of their pre-migration experiences and overlay of additional expenses and of policies which exclude a subset of them from income support and employment assistance (Taylor 2004, p. 6).

Without English proficiency, refugees are readily excluded from many aspects of life, including employment, education, access to services and social interaction (Taylor 2004, p. 13).

'We are looking at pockets of a lost generation. We have 18- and 19-year-olds being put into Year 10 with an educational base of maybe two years ...' (quoted in Bagnall 2006, p. 4).

These papers also identify the types of issues that make the settlement process difficult for refugees and asylum seekers from the Horn of Africa. These include:

- adjustment issues regarding education and law and order;
- poor access to essential local services and community structures, from sporting clubs to child care centres;
- lack of cultural appropriateness in the content and delivery of health education and services;
- restricted access to education and relatively high school drop-out rates;
- time taken to assess and recognise overseas qualifications;
- lack of knowledge in the broader Australian community about Africa and African–Australians.

Refugees need accessible and affordable English tuition and interpreting and translation services to enable employment, education, use of services and social contact (Taylor 2004, p. 17).

Education is often seen by refugees as the key to their future settlement and to their or their children's inclusion in the host society. Refugee parents often lack knowledge of the educational system, and young people face pressure to leave school to contribute financially to family and relatives overseas (Taylor 2004, p. 14).

These papers also identify factors that will promote settlement of refugees. Those that are most relevant to public library services are:

- providing a welcoming host community that is informed, has the capacity to build ties with newcomers, and is an effective way of dealing with discrimination if it arises;
- ensuring access to English tuition classes available to those with and without work and offering social contact;
- providing opportunities to refugees and asylum seekers to participate in their communities, especially through sharing of their culture and crafts.

As Nela Milic, a member of the United Kingdom's Refugees in the Arts Initiative and a refugee, notes of libraries:

I know that you are not language schools, but you are the treasurers of language and that treasure needs to be shared with us (Milic 2004, p. 19).

C2 Library and information needs

A comprehensive review of the literature on library services and discussions with community members through the Connecting with the Community research project have identified the main library and information needs of Horn of Africa communities. These are summarised below, and in many ways are also applicable to other emerging communities.

Library and information needs: Horn of Africa communities

Accurate, up-to-date and sufficient information about government and community services.

Information skills and IT skills essential to work and school.

Access to computers and the Internet.

Connections to the broader community.

Information on government and community services

The primary information need of Horn of Africa communities is access to accurate, up-to-date and sufficient information about government and community services. This is essential to assist community members to access the housing, employment, education, welfare and social services they require. A significant challenge for migrants in new and unfamiliar surroundings is not knowing what services and support are available:

People need to know what they can get and how to get it. They need support on housing information, they need support on employment information. So there's a whole range of information needs which libraries in particular are in a good position to provide (Bell 2004, p. 21).

As a central community information hub, public libraries provide a single point of reference for migrants to access this important information. Libraries may also provide this information on services, but this is secondary to their being an efficient access point. A report from the United Kingdom emphasises that the best way for libraries to

meet these information needs is by helping refugees to make links to community workers and other agencies, rather than trying to provide primary information themselves (Thebridge & Nankivell 2004).

For those Horn of Africa migrants with low English language skills, government and community service information needs to be available in relevant community languages, such as Arabic or Lebanese.

During community consultations, specific mention was made of the value of practical information related to accessing public transport, traffic rules, how to get a licence, courts, marriage celebrants, and other everyday activities.

Information and information technology skills

Many Horn of Africa migrants have limited education and little or no information or information technology skills, skills which are becoming increasingly important in the workplace and in education, in accessing community services, and in communication, especially for young people.

Through programs targeted at skill development and by providing an environment where migrants can test and enhance these skills, public libraries can support migrants to develop information technology skills and the confidence to access information and use computers.

Access to computers

Libraries can help Horn of Africa migrants to bridge the digital divide. Access to computers and the Internet can help refugees to keep in touch with people at home, develop skills that are essential at work and school, and meet their information needs.

Connections to the broader community

Refugees and asylum seekers, and the Horn of Africa community in particular, seek understanding and acceptance in their new communities. They wish to understand the way in which the community where they now live operates, and at the same time would like

to share information about their cultural background. Though strictly speaking this may not be seen as meeting an information need, it is part of the wider role of public libraries in building social capital by fostering connections between new population groups and the broader community.

Crawley (2004) argues that libraries can play an important role in creating greater awareness in the broader community about refugees and asylum seekers. This information can be disseminated through sources that people come into contact with every day. She describes how libraries can provide:

... spaces for public debate and discussion – ways of really bringing out the asylum and refugee issue in a safe space that allows people to discuss these issues in a way that engages with what their concerns are and provides them with the kind of information that they think they need (Crawley 2004, p. 13).

C3 Ideas and lessons

Victorian public libraries and their counterparts interstate and overseas have implemented a range of programs to support the library and information needs of Horn of Africa communities, refugees and asylum seekers. Some examples are provided here, with additional reports in 'Further reading' in section C6.

Building Bridges: Making Connections, Nottingham City Libraries and Information Services, United Kingdom

The Building Bridges: Making Connections project in Nottingham in 2004 to 2006 aimed to reach out to refugees and asylum seekers through libraries. With the support of a grant received from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, the project sought to break down barriers, to improve access to services, and to respond to the developing needs of local asylum seekers and refugees (Zvonic, Parish & Bangar 2007).

The project had the following key features:

- It was supported by a Steering Committee and Partners Group. The members were drawn from a range of organisations, agencies and council departments, including representatives from refugee action and community groups. Partners contributed a wealth of experience in this area of work and their skills have proved invaluable in achieving objectives. Both the Partners Group and the Steering Committee were important in providing a framework for libraries to be part of the multi-agency support network in Nottingham.
- Libraries took opportunities to promote library services and participate in events organised by community agencies where local services available to refugee communities were presented. The library service held a promotional stall at each event and displayed relevant book, audio and visual stock. Where large numbers of children were expected, they also provided a storytelling corner.
- In three information technology taster sessions, adult refugees and asylum seekers had the opportunity to acquire skills in information technology, mainly access to the Internet and email. To overcome barriers to participation, organisers provided child care, interpreters and learning guidance to suit people's individual needs (e.g. participants could acquire basic skills such as how to open an email account in just one session).
- People whose personal and psychological difficulties meant that they were unable to take part in group sessions were given induction in the use of Internet facilities at libraries and setting up email addresses. One woman from Eritrea benefited greatly from learning how to use email as her only personal support came from a friend back home. She said: 'It is great that I can now communicate with my friend without paying for huge phone bills.'
- The project set up weekly conversation sessions. Improvement of English language knowledge is an essential skill that improves prospects for finding work, building social relations and achieving greater independence. One of the appeals of the conversation

sessions is that the atmosphere is informal and relaxed and learners feel supported and stimulated in the learning process. Each week a session is based around a different topic, thus broadening the range of vocabulary and comprehension. Sessions aim to encourage cultural exchange of information about traditions, attitudes and values, as well as give an insight and better understanding into British culture and the refugees' new social environment. The sessions also provide communication practice around practical skills such as renting a property and looking for work.

- The project encouraged the development of reading skills through provision of English graded readers. Many learners do not feel confident about themselves as readers, and reading a book in a new language seems unachievable. Introducing them to graded readers at a suitable level builds their confidence and interest in reading for pleasure, as well as developing language skills.
- Libraries were promoted to primary school children as a safe and welcoming environment which facilitates learning and enjoyment. Children learned to search for materials that interested them through a Dewey Bingo game. This was particularly useful in familiarising children with the library catalogue and locating books on the shelves. Some teachers pointed out that it was a pleasant experience for the children to feel welcomed and valued at a public venue by getting the attention from the staff and enjoying a relaxed atmosphere, complete with snacks.
- The project increased the provision of relevant stock in libraries. In response to the finding that some asylum seekers have little awareness of British road rules and regulation, the libraries purchased the *Highway Code* from a small independent publisher in the six main languages spoken by asylum seeker and refugee communities. The library also purchased and promoted pregnancy and childbirth videos in foreign languages. In expanding its collection, the library liaised with knowledgeable members of the community to identify appropriate material, and had a flexible approach to funding and sourcing acquisitions.

- Through training that provided information on particular needs and circumstances of asylum seekers and refugees, staff were made more aware of these issues and gained confidence in working with them.
- Identifying a point of contact in the library that staff can approach for any information and advice regarding service provision to asylum seekers and refugees has been a key element in ensuring an efficient and fair service.

Welcome To Your Library, London Libraries Development Agency, United Kingdom

The Welcome To Your Library initiative was coordinated through the London Libraries Development Agency across five London borough public library services, and funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation (Carpenter 2004). The aim was to identify and overcome some of the barriers that asylum seekers and refugees face in using public library services. The Welcome To Your Library website provides comprehensive information about the initiative and inspiration for libraries everywhere (www.welcometoyourlibrary.org.uk).

Three key priorities in England's national public library strategy *Framework for the Future* (DCMS 2003) provided a context for the Welcome To Your Library work:

- promotion of reading and informal learning;
- access to digital skills and services including e-government;
- measures to tackle social exclusion, build community identity and develop citizenship.

Some highlights from this initiative include:

- collecting baseline information to understand as fully as possible who was in their neighbourhood, where they were and what these potential users wanted;
- finding out about barriers and needs;
- raising the profile of services on offer, with emphasis on sensitivity to language and a personal approach to reaching people and getting and building people's trust over time;

- developing stock and other resources with input from refugees and asylum seekers to ensure relevance, and also encouraging production of new material in appropriate languages;
- storytelling events and workshops as an opportunity to explore identity in a safe and neutral environment.

You need to be sensitive about how you're going to elicit people's views and reach people effectively ... you don't just barge in and do it to your own timetable ... Not everybody comes from countries where there are institutions like public libraries. There's a huge amount of awareness-raising to be done ... Facilitating contact between communities could really start to create a set of relationships between the library service and people from different ethnic origins and open doors to much, much more comprehensive involvement in the development of services (Carpenter 2004, p. 28).

The key lessons offered by the projects are:

- Work in context, not in an isolated world of libraries or museums or archives (or even all three) and place what you are doing in the context of overall government programs and objectives.
- Get active involvement of the users that you want to reach, in both planning and delivery.
- Identify human and financial resources that will enable you to mainstream the work, build capacity and create sustainability.

Making it Work, Archives, Libraries and Museums London, United Kingdom

In a paper for Archives, Libraries and Museums London, Michael Bell (2004) outlines a number of key success factors for libraries working with refugees and asylum seekers, based on project experience from across the United Kingdom. The findings are being drawn together into a good practice toolkit called *Making it Work*.

In summary, these key factors are:

- Making plans – identifying needs and clarifying goals:
 - establish links with refugee community organisations and other service providers;
 - involve potential service users in identifying needs;
 - be clear about what you can and cannot do.
- Making it public and making it easy – promoting services and ensuring access:
 - early and appropriate promotional material;
 - exploit links and networks;
 - make your services easier to access;
 - make your service part of a more holistic approach.
- Making friends – achieving results through partnerships:
 - engage with appropriate networks and partners.
- Making it better – learning from experiences.
- Making it last – creating sustainable services.

We see a number of projects where refugees and refugee community organisations have felt disengaged because they've been promised the earth and received very little. If the projects that had been set up were much clearer about the limits to their remit, there would probably have been a lot more satisfaction, and probably a lot more celebration of the success of those projects (Bell 2004, p. 22).

Bell (2004) emphasises that libraries as information providers are very important in helping refugees address their lack of understanding of how the system works. Libraries contribute to community participation and cohesion and help both host communities and refugee and asylum seeker communities better understand each other.

Refugee Resources and Collection Service, Merton Libraries, United Kingdom

Merton Libraries' pioneering Refugee Resources and Collection Service seeks to help asylum seekers and refugees become self-sufficient and make a new life (The Library Association 2001). The project was developed when Asylum Welcome, a Wimbledon-based drop-in centre for refugees, contacted Merton's library service for help. Library staff started visiting the centre, found out what languages the refugees spoke and came back with whatever books they could find. They now regularly visit the drop-in centre where they issue books and other materials in a range of ethnic languages. Groups are walked to the nearest library to see how easy it is to gain access to a wealth of information, and the library service has organised arts and cultural events focusing on the lives of refugees.

The Refugee Resources and Collection Service initiative received a Libraries Change Lives award from the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals in 2001.

Working with young refugees, London Borough of Brent Libraries, United Kingdom

The Harlesden Library in the London Borough of Brent has a project aimed at raising the profile of reading and literacy skills among young refugees and asylum seekers and countering stereotypes of refugees through arts and drama (WTYL 2007). This project is an initiative with the Brent Youth Partnership, Brent Refugee Forum and a local school, Alperton, and was funded through the Community Chest. The library engaged a tutor to work with 28 young people in the library over 20 weeks, with two sessions per week, covering English for speakers of other languages, drama, reading and writing. At the end of the sessions, the young people wrote articles about their views of war, their fears and aspirations. The work culminated in a showcase of arts, drama, writings and dance. The project staff emphasise the importance of making connections and building trust between the library service and the other partners, particularly refugee community organisations. This was

an essential first step before commencing and funding this work. Time, persistence and patience were all seen as essential.

For more information see: www.welcometoyourlibrary.org.uk/editorial.asp?page_id=52

Turning Corners, Leeds Library and Information Service, United Kingdom

Turning Corners, a cycling project run by the Leeds Library and Information Service in association with the Leeds City Council Road Safety Unit, has sought to engage young refugees and improve their literacy skills through something they enjoy doing – cycling (WTYL 2007). The main components of the 2005 program were:

- Practical sessions, including bicycle repair and maintenance – The content was interesting, creative and fun-based, and met learning objectives such as developing participants' literacy skills, extending vocabulary and encouraging verbal expression. The sessions also covered all the relevant themes and topics appropriate to cycling.
- Cycle training – This incorporated health and safety issues, bike checks and playground riding skills assessment. 'On road' training included hazard awareness, road positioning, and left and right turns to and from minor and major junctions.
- Library-based sessions – These covered joining the library and how to use the library and its facilities.

The outcomes of the project for participants include: increased self-esteem and confidence; increase in participants' use of spoken English; promotion of health, fitness and exercise; passing of the cycling proficiency and road safety test; and participants joining the library and becoming aware of the services offered, including jobs and skills support.

For more information see: www.welcometoyourlibrary.org.uk/editorial.asp?page_id=43

Camden Libraries Refugee Work Experience project, Camden Libraries, United Kingdom

The Camden Libraries Refugee Work Experience project began in June 2004 (WYTL 2007). It provides structured work placements for refugees and asylum seekers with information technology skills and entry level 2 English. Each work placement lasts for 12 weeks for 15 hours a week and includes payment for lunch and travel expenses. Experience includes training in library management systems, routine library duties and familiarisation with the United Kingdom's working culture. Placements have access to the library learning centre support for information technology and English language courses that help with drawing up a curriculum vitae, job seeker skills and interviewing technique. Some participants have used their new skills to tell the Local History and Archives Library the story of their immigration. Many have talked to primary school children about their experiences, helping to break down the barriers between cultures.

As the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals – which gave the project a Libraries Change Lives award in 2007 – notes:

The scheme has been successful in building self esteem, contact with the wider community, and developing an understanding of workplace rules and regulations, enabling refugees to access basic skills including developing CVs and attending computer sessions in library learning centres. The programme also provides a daily routine to follow whilst balancing home and work life (CILIP 2007),

For more information see: www.welcometoyourlibrary.org.uk/editorial.asp?page_id=53

Embracing diversity and empowering citizens, Aarhus Public Libraries, Denmark

Aarhus Public Libraries in western Denmark has a reputation for being a world leader in the provision of services to immigrant and refugee communities, receiving in 2004 a Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation Access to Learning Award for this work. Nearly 12% of the Aarhus population consists of immigrants or refugees; this figure rises to 43% and 27% respectively in the areas served by the library's Gellerup and Hasle branches, which cater for many Middle Eastern and African nationalities, including Somalis, Congans, Lebanese and Kurds, Iraqi, Iranian, Afghan and Turkish people. Jack Jackson's *Aarhus Public Libraries: Embracing Diversity, Empowering Citizens in Denmark* (2005) provides a comprehensive report on the services offered and the underpinning principles and philosophy.

Key services supporting immigrants and refugees with the information they need to participate in community life include:

- The People's Information office (folkeinformation), in Gellerup library, is a municipal service staffed by seven bicultural 'new Danes' – including a Somali, a Congan, a Lebanese and a Kurd – who help immigrants and refugees who speak little or no Danish communicate with authorities, employers and others.
- The Job Corner, in a cosy nook in Gellerup library, is equipped with computers, printers and notice boards to display employment advertisements printed daily from the Danish Internet job portal. In addition to the dedicated workstations, the library offers counselling services on preparing a résumé and job application as well as introductory courses in how to use the databases of the public employment service and others.
- The Health Centre is located in the meeting room attached to the Gellerup library and consists of three units: health care specialists, dental therapists and midwives. The centre holds an open house most afternoons, where individuals and groups can drop by without an appointment to ask questions or air concerns. Courses are scheduled for parents, groups and individuals on topics such as contraception, heart

disease, high blood pressure, childhood illnesses and good nutrition.

- The IT Competence Boost is an ongoing program at the Gellerup and Hasle libraries primarily intended for immigrant and refugee women to teach them basic information technology skills. Skilled volunteer guides from the immigrants' own neighbourhoods take these sessions, which are occasionally accompanied by samples of folklore, music, dance and food from the participants' native countries.
- The FINFO service, an online service for immigrants and refugees (www.finno.dk) gives access to valuable information about the Danish state and society (e.g. asylum, residence, work, education, politics, culture) in 13 languages, including Somali, Arabic, English, Urdu and Persian. Links are also provided to news, music, literature and other useful information websites from the countries of origin of many immigrants and refugees in Denmark. This service is provided cooperatively by 70 municipalities and the state library.

The American Place, Hartford Public Library, Connecticut, United States of America

The American Place is a free library service for immigrants and refugees (Hartford Public Library 2008). Its main goal is to help people adjust to life in America while preserving elements of their native culture. The programs are free and include practical advice for living in the United States, classes for learning English, information on becoming a citizen, and instruction on how to use the library to find information on jobs, health, housing, education and other topics of interest. The American Place is a recipient of the National Award for Library Service.

Citizenship and immigration services, Queens Library, New York, United States of America

The Queens Library in New York offers a range of citizenship and new immigrant services (Byrne 2006). These include:

- a list of agencies in the area offering citizenship preparation classes and immigration services for free or for low or sliding-scale fees;

- coping skills and cultural programs, which include presentations on topics essential to new immigrants' 'acculturation' to American culture, as well as citizenship and job training information, advice on helping children learn, and information on available social services;
- a directory of Immigrant Serving Agencies in over 50 languages, which contains information on agencies offering low-cost or free social services to immigrants;
- a Learn English program provided through six adult learning centres;
- Mail-a-Book for new immigrants in which selected books can be mailed to a new immigrants' home with return by mail using postage-paid labels supplied by the library. The aim is to introduce new immigrants to the library's collections.

Collections and engagement, Maribyrnong Library Service, Victoria

Maribyrnong, in the inner western suburbs of Melbourne, has the second most ethnically diverse population in Victoria, with 40% of residents born outside Australia. This includes a significant proportion of refugees and asylum seekers from the Horn of Africa. The Maribyrnong Library Service conducts events and programs (e.g. a women's sewing group) to celebrate the area's cultural and linguistic diversity and create greater awareness of the rich array of people living in the community. These are described in the Libraries Building Communities *Showcasing the Best* reports, volumes 1 and 2 (State Library of Victoria 2005, 2008).

In 2005, the Maribyrnong Library Service undertook extensive consultation with African community leaders and Horn of Africa groups to support its development of an African languages collection. Issues covered include types of languages spoken, types of material required, subject interests, availability of resources, and computer training needs. The African Languages Collection was launched in August 2005.

As part of its Celebrating Diversity program in 2005, the library ran an African True Stories session. Three African migrants told their stories, from the time they left their

hometown to the present day, highlighting their struggle, tenacity and achievement. The session was followed by an Ethiopian coffee ceremony.

Language programs, Brimbank Library and Information Service, Victoria

Brimbank Library and Information Service and Victoria University are starting to run English classes at the library for Horn of Africa communities. Groups are brought in to the library and someone who speaks their language walks them through the library, explaining the services available. If they can see something familiar (e.g. a CD of music from their country of origin or a picture book in their language) this can help to develop their language skills.

Cultural diversity training, Western English Language School, Victoria

The Western English Language School is a multicampus Victorian government school that provides high-quality programs in English as a second language for primary and secondary school-age students throughout the western suburbs of Melbourne. The school also runs professional development courses for teachers, multicultural education aides and other professionals working with migrants for whom English is a second language.

The school has run courses for library staff from Brimbank Library and Information Service on differences in communities and cultures, exploring some of the social niceties that are often taken for granted. The course fosters greater understanding among library staff of different communities and how to work with particular groups. Some municipal councils have been doing this type of work for several years and have a good understanding of the issues involved.

Melbourne City Library has brought people in from local colleges to talk with library staff about what language and support services they can provide.

CALD Senior Surfers on the Internet, State Library of Victoria/Department of Planning and Community Development, Victoria

The CALD Senior Surfers project, a joint initiative between the State Library of Victoria and the Office of Senior Victorians, was developed to provide an opportunity for Victorian seniors from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds to learn about the Internet. The project, in 2005–06, set out to gauge the level of interest in the Internet by CALD seniors, trial various approaches to training delivery, and take learning from the project to inform the design of future projects.

The most tangible asset of the project has been an *Introduction to the Internet* handout being tested and produced in 13 languages. The handout is part of a package or delivery model containing session plans, translated instructional materials, suggestions for multilingual online content, advice on interpreter usage and cultural sensitivity, and technical information on browser set-up.

Multicultural Bridge, State Library of Queensland, Queensland

Multicultural Bridge (www.slq.qld.gov.au/info/lang) is part of an ongoing strategy from the State Library of Queensland that provides information in 19 languages about the library's collections, services and activities including the Languages Other Than English collection of approximately 113,000 books in over 60 languages. The website can be used to discover how to find books, music, videos, maps, pictures and family history information. It also provides information about public library services in Queensland and has links to a range of websites in languages other than English.

C4 Accessing and using library services

Discussion with members of Victoria's Horn of Africa communities, community organisations and public library staff with an interest in supporting their access to public library services identified a number of significant factors that influence how Horn of Africa communities use their local libraries. These are summarised below.

Factors influencing library use: Horn of Africa communities	
Awareness	Generally low level of awareness of services offered by public libraries. Lack of familiarity with libraries as a concept.
Engagement	Willingness to participate in library activities (presenting opportunities for promoting wider community engagement).
Collections, programs and services	Limited collections in community languages. Low-level literacy and computer skills.
Policies and procedures	Difficulties in taking up library membership. Lack of awareness of library rules.
Customer service	Sensitivity of library staff to user's comfort levels.

It should be noted, however, that the factors that influence, either positively or negatively, use of public library services by different groups in the community can vary considerably. Issues related to accessing public libraries and the quality and presentation of library facilities were identified through the Connecting with the Community research as significant for some groups, yet were not seen as constraints on library use by Horn of Africa communities.

It should also be noted that the factors that influence library use vary *within* communities. That is, the issues of most relevance to older male Africans were not the same

as those raised by African teenagers (e.g. access to resources in community languages versus a preference for resources in English).

The following summation from discussion with library staff captures some of the challenges libraries face in achieving widespread engagement of African communities:

Ninety-five per cent of Africans don't come to the library – they're scared, shy and don't know how to find a book or use a computer. Language is an issue. They find it hard to communicate with librarians. They need to have a reason to go to a library – some don't have those goals. Some people want to learn more and read more books – but they are not in their language. Even DVDs are in English, not Arabic or Dinka.

Awareness of library services

Although there are clear patterns of frequent and intensive use of public libraries by some members of the African community, it would be more accurate to say that there is generally a low level of awareness of the role of libraries and the services they offer.

Some members of the Horn of Africa communities are very willing to engage with their public libraries, and are regular users of library services (e.g. it is estimated that 35% of users at Maribyrnong Library Service are of African origin – men, mums, teenage children). These are people who have become aware of what services are available and which are most relevant to them. For older and working-age Africans, this can include access to the Internet, access to information on government services, and access to newspapers and essential community information. For younger school-age Africans, some of whom are daily library users, this includes research and reference material (that they do not have access to at home and is not available at school), and access to the Internet for communication and entertainment purposes.

However, this level of awareness is not widespread. Some members of African communities, often but not

exclusively women, are less familiar with the concept of a free public library and have little or no experience of libraries. They do not know what is and is not available in a library; they may have poor English language skills; they may feel uncomfortable asking questions about how to find resources; and they may be unfamiliar with a friendly service culture. This can be very stressful and make it difficult for them to feel comfortable in a library. Other community members simply have no knowledge of library services.

Community engagement

Members of Horn of Africa communities who are familiar with their library tend to be very engaged, and are not only keen to be involved in library activities but have suggestions for ways that library services can better meet their individual and their community's needs. This active participation is seen in areas where there is a history of settlement (e.g. Maribyrnong, Brimbank) and areas where communities are just starting to emerge (e.g. Wyndham). Library staff have noticed people from the African community introducing others to the library.

There is also an observable interest among some African parents in actively supporting the education of their children through participation in homework activities. This may also provide opportunities for wider engagement with the Horn of Africa community beyond those students and parents who are currently library users.

Library staff also suggested that there appears to be a drop-off in library engagement once young Africans leave school, particularly among girls aged 15 or 16 years or more. Young people who are no longer at school, undertaking further education or in employment are a group whose information needs can be met by public libraries. However, this is likely to be true of all young people, and not be an issue peculiar to young Africans.

It was also noted that the attitudes of other library patrons affect the way some migrant groups feel in their library. Although generally library patrons are welcoming of new users, lack of understanding of and

familiarity with different cultures, combined with a 'fear of the unknown', can mean that some patrons are less accepting than others. For example, some library patrons have expressed concern with groups of young Africans 'hanging out' together in the library. Again, this is an issue that is not unique to African communities and needs to be managed sensitively through normal library procedures and through library activities that provide opportunities for users to meet and develop greater awareness of each other's cultures.

Library programs and collections

The primary issue for Horn of Africa communities in using library services is the absence of resources in their community languages. A challenge facing many library services as they try to accommodate the information needs of the diverse ethnic populations in their community is to develop a sufficiently wide and deep collection to support refugee populations that can emerge within the space of five to ten years, and then potentially disperse throughout the wider community as new migrant groups arrive. Libraries could take advantage of the fact that the language needs of these different migrant groups can intersect over time. For example, library collections of resources in Lebanese that were developed some time ago and have now been disbanded could be usefully deployed to support groups within the Horn of Africa community. As noted in section C1, though there are Horn of Africa communities in several municipalities, there are relatively higher concentrations in Greater Dandenong, Moonee Valley, Brimbank and Maribyrnong.

Both library staff and African library users noted the difficulties posed by limited collections in community languages. Some libraries with a collection for children to learn to read find that this is heavily used by adults, as it is one of the few reading resources they can access.

Where available, bilingual material is thought to be the best – especially for children as parents want them to learn and speak English and at the same time know their own language and culture. Audio material is also popular,

especially as some languages have a primarily oral tradition.

When asked about the cost of developing language-specific collections, Africans who are current library users indicated that they would be prepared to bear some of the cost if they individually and as a community could access a more substantial and well-maintained collection.

The importance of having relevant collections is reinforced by the experience of some one-off library users from Horn of Africa communities. These users indicated that, having gone to a library to use books to fill their main information need and being unable to do so, have left and not returned since, despite knowing that there are other library services that might also be of value to them.

The quality of material is also an issue. It may be possible to import material but it may not be up to the standard of publishing expected in Australia. Users are less likely to see this as a concern.

Many Africans have limited English skills, and do not have much experience in reading and writing, even in their own spoken language. This constrains their access to information on government and community services, and their wider use of library services. Training and supportive resources (e.g. texts, grammar books) are all required. Short courses on computers are also seen as valuable for those Africans who do not have access to computers at home and need to develop these skills for work, education, communication or leisure activities.

Policies and procedures

The research identified two issues related to library policies and procedures. The first was that many Horn of Africa migrants do not have the motor or literacy skills to efficiently sign up for library membership. Some Victorian public library services have introduced simplified sign-up processes for migrants experiencing these difficulties.

The second issue was that, as with other hard-to-reach groups, the behaviour of some African community members does not conform with what is generally expected in libraries. Shouting in libraries, bringing food to the library (and having dinner around a library table), leaving young children at the library in the care of older siblings, and a more relaxed attitude to time and appointments all create challenges for libraries. Some libraries are addressing these issues by carefully re-examining their expected norms of behaviour – often in conjunction with library users – and then clearly communicating what is agreed as acceptable behaviour through appropriate signage within the library.

Customer service

Some African library users find it difficult to approach library staff for assistance. There is no indication that this is due to library staff not responding to inquiries or being unhelpful, more that there is unease, discomfort and sometimes feelings of ignorance and shame in asking for assistance and explanations (especially if this relates to library rules or fines). Some Africans consulted during the research said that this situation might be eased if the library employed staff of African origin. However, while this would almost certainly help, other persons consulted indicated that a more active orientation from both library users and library staff, and greater sensitivity to the potential discomfort of African library users, could achieve the same end.

C5 Connecting with the community

A range of potential responses from Victorian public libraries to the findings of the Connecting with the Community research project with regard to the Horn of Africa community is presented below.

Opportunities for libraries to reach out to communities: Horn of Africa communities	
Collaboration and partnerships	<p>Libraries work collaboratively on planning, promotion, collections development and staff training.</p> <p>Libraries establish partnerships with local community organisations and complementary service providers.</p>
Engagement and promotion	<p>Use existing African library users and community representatives to promote library services and support new library users.</p> <p>Use children's programs, other established library programs, council programs and community locations to promote library services.</p> <p>Support and collaboratively promote specialist collections and library centres.</p>
Collections, programs and services	<p>Collaborative development of and investment in library collections.</p> <p>Map existing collections in community languages.</p> <p>Support development of literacy and computer skills.</p>
Library facilities	<p>Provide computers with Arabic keyboards.</p>
Customer service	<p>Libraries employ library staff of African origin or who speak relevant community languages.</p> <p>Libraries provide professional development related to cultural awareness.</p>

Collaboration and partnerships

The experience of libraries in Victoria in providing services relevant to refugee communities is reinforced by research from the United Kingdom. The changing

nature and high regional turnover of the refugee and asylum seeker community provides particular challenges for library service providers. In response, Thebridge and Nankivell (2004) suggest that libraries work collaboratively to develop more effective and practical services and approaches to supporting refugees and asylum seekers. Joint library partnership projects could be aimed at:

- simplifying joining procedures to make them consistent across all library services;
- producing common 'joining packs' or similar promotional material;
- joint training across services (both information training for library users and cultural awareness training for library staff);
- developing and maintaining coordinated information and websites to support refugees, which could include information about accessing library services;
- establishing a joint team or individual to monitor and evaluate services to refugees across a network of libraries.

These suggestions could be considered by Victorian library services with Horn of Africa populations, and extended to collaborative collections development, acquisitions and supplier management, as some libraries have already done.

There is also likely to be value in library services developing strong relationships with relevant community organisations and service providers that represent and support Horn of Africa communities, as occurred at Maribyrnong Library Service. These organisations include Adult Multicultural Education Services, migrant resource centres, and local African community groups. Increased linkages with other council services and their multicultural officers could be effective. The purpose of these partnerships would be to promote wider use of library services to the community, and not to fulfil government's broader community development objectives. These partnerships could be used to inform library policy development, support promotions activities, and inform collections and acquisition approaches.

Community engagement and promotion

Some members of the Horn of Africa communities are regular and passionate library users, including both older and younger people, male and female. Through these people and representatives of local community groups there presents an opportunity for promoting the services provided by public libraries and engaging more Africans in libraries.

All library services already have general children's programs, and some teenage Africans regularly use public libraries for homework purposes. Existing programs might be targeted to particular migrant groups to encourage greater participation by parents and their friends in the African community to promote awareness of available library services and encourage greater use of library services. Promoting library activities to hard-to-reach groups through council services such as playgroups and maternal and child health centres is another way of generating a ripple effect to raise awareness about library services that are relevant to targeted community groups. So too being aware of formal and informal community meeting places (e.g. restaurants where African men congregate, women's walking groups) provides additional avenues for promotion of library services.

Cultural events in libraries are seen to be effective in building community engagement, especially for African women who have skills and interests in their arts and crafts but no avenue for getting together or sharing their skills. Library participation might increase if nominated libraries with specialisation in a particular collection (e.g. Somali resources) had statewide or regional responsibility for managing this collection, conducting relevant promotional activities and programs, and encouraging through neighbouring library services participation from Horn of Africa groups across municipalities.

In all promotional activities with Horn of Africa communities it should be noted, however, that as many people have low levels of English literacy and some languages have a mainly oral tradition (e.g. Somali has only had a written form since the 1970s), brochures and

pamphlets about library services may not be the most effective means of communication.

Library programs and collections

It is difficult for a single library service to justify significant investment in a collection to support a particular migrant community when it knows that in time this group will disperse and be replaced by other migrant communities. Greater levels of collaboration and joint planning on collections development would appear to be necessary. Involving local community representatives in collections development would also ensure that relevant resources are identified. For example, young African people involved in this research strongly indicated that they saw no value in having access to resources in their traditional language as their energies were focused on improving their English language skills.

At the same time, work could be done to map existing collections in relevant languages for Horn of Africa communities to make it easier for library users and library staff to know what is available, locally and in nearby libraries.

Analysis of Australian Bureau of Statistics' 2006 Census data would also assist library services to better understand the size and demographic profile of their migrant population.

The demand for access to literacy programs and training on use of computers is not limited to Horn of Africa communities. However, the demand for these services is strong in the African community and libraries may provide a forum for delivering or facilitating access to these services. Where English language skills are very low, interpreters may be required.

Library facilities

Some African library users see access to the Internet as a valuable service, others do not. For those older, mainly male, Africans with limited English-writing skills who want to communicate with family and friends overseas and access news in their country of origin, having access to an Arabic keyboard would make it easier to use the Internet.

Having spaces, furniture and tables available for group meetings and family gatherings might also encourage communal engagement with the library and use of library resources and facilities.

Customer service

Reducing any barriers between African library users and library staff could be assisted by employing people of African origin or people who speak relevant community languages in libraries or in the promotion of libraries to community groups. Scholarships for persons speaking community languages, subsidies to encourage staff to learn languages, or provision of common questions and answers in other languages for use by library staff (see City Library, a branch of Melbourne Library Service) might be considered.

Recognising that this may not be possible, professional development for existing library staff could focus on ensuring greater awareness of the potential cultural reluctance of African library users to ask for the assistance that they need to fulfil their information and service needs. The emphasis, as it is with all library users, would be on helping people to do things themselves. When dealing with African library users, language barriers, lack of familiarity with libraries and lack of confidence need to be understood.

C6 References and further reading

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