Natalia Taylor Bowdoin, Chris Hagar, Joyce Monsees, Trishanjit Kaur, Trae Middlebrooks, Leatha Miles-Edmonson, Ashanti White, Touger Vang, Musa Wakhungu Olaka, Charles Agai Yier, Clara M. Chu, and Barbara J. Ford

Academic libraries serving refugees and asylum seekers

Approaches for support

Refugees and asylum seekers are very much in the news today, and libraries work to identify information resources, services, skills, training and/or research in order to support the resettlement and integration of these groups. ALA has passed resolutions and gathered information about how libraries respond to and empower immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. Public libraries have often been leaders in these activities providing library cards; computers with Internet access; free wifi; books, movies, and materials in a number of languages; English classes; electronic resources; programs on topics, such as job searching; and library staff to assist with questions.

Academic libraries also support research and the teaching of refugees forced into migration as well as library users who are refugees and asylum seekers. Project Welcome[1] is a planning grant funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services to support the Mortenson Center for International Library Programs at the University of Illinois (in partnership with ALA) to learn about how libraries can address information needs of refugees and asylum seekers, and develop recommendations and an action plan to serve this community.

The projects outlined below were presented or discussed at a summit on February 6, 2017, and hopefully will help academic libraries think about their roles in supporting refugees and asylum seekers.

The information needs and information-seeking behavior of refugees from CAR in two U.S. communities: Important lessons for libraries—Natalia Taylor Bowdoin, University of South Carolina-Aiken

A research grant from the Office of the

Natalia Taylor Bowdoin is associate professor/library collections coordinator/Interdisciplinary Studies coordinator at the University of South Carolina-Aiken, email nataliab@usca.edu, Chris Hagar is associate professor, School of Information, at San Jose State University, email: christine.hagar@sjsu.edu, Joyce Monsees is executive director at Standby Task Force, email: joyce@standbytaskforce.com, Trishanjit Kaur is professor and head of the Department of Library and Information Science at Punjabi University, email: trishanjit.kaur@gmail.com, Trae Middlebrooks is late night library supervisor at High Point University, email: tapwater86@gmail.com, Leatha Miles-Edmonson is research and instructional services librarian at Marquette University, email: leatha.miles-edmonson@ marquette.edu, Ashanti White is a doctoral candidate at California Institute of Integral Studies, email: ashantilwhite@yahoo.com, Touger Vang is program services coordinator at Yolo County Library, email: tougervang@gmail.com, Musa Wakhungu Olaka is librarian for African, Global and International Studies at the University of Kansas, email: musaolaka@ ku.edu, and Charles Agai Yier is resident librarian at the University of Iowa, email: charles-yier@uiowa.edu

Contact series editors Clara M. Chu, email: cmchu@ illinois.edu, and Barbara Ford, email: bjford@illinois.edu, with article ideas.

Vice-President of Research at the University of South Carolina made possible a phenomenological study of refugees from the Central African Republic (CAR), living in two communities in the United States, concerning their information needs and information-seeking behavior.

A successful coup in 2013 plunged the country into extreme violence and resulted in massive internal and external displacement of more than a fifth of its population.

Due to the extreme poverty and underdevelopment of the country, CAR refugees arriving in the United States are one of the most disadvantaged refugee groups the United States has seen. The majority arrive speaking only Sango and have little education or work history outside of subsistence farming. CAR refugee groups also have high numbers of single mothers arriving with multiple children who often have major health concerns. Because they are at such a great disadvantage, understanding their information-seeking behavior, the exact nature of their information needs, and the extent to which these needs are currently being met is vital to their successful resettlement.

The interview instrument consisted of 31 questions covering basic demographics, information practices, extent of support networks, and perceptions of information needs and challenges in the United States. What emerged from the interviews was both inspiring and heartbreaking. Their resilience, fortitude, and often sense of humor in the face of seemingly overwhelming obstacles was truly astounding.

While it is not possible to present all the results from the study here, one thing that became very obvious was that libraries have a long way to go in reaching this, and similar, populations. Only 3 of the 39 interviewees mentioned a local (public or academic) library at all.

For one man, the library was a place to go to take English classes, for another it was where he used the Internet, and for the last it was where his daughter would use the Internet and occasionally find information for him. More research, collaboration with social service agencies, and outreach are essential to understanding the information needs of refugees and how libraries can help them meet these needs.

Information needs and barriers of Southeast Asian refugee undergraduates—Clara M. Chu, Mortenson Center for International Library Programs (University of Illinois); Trae Middlebrooks, High Point University; Leatha Miles-Edmonson, Marquette University; Ashanti White, California Institute of Integral Studies; and Touger Vang, Yolo County Library

While academic libraries wish to serve their diverse user communities, few studies exist that shed light on the information needs of refugees, such as Southeast Asian refugee undergraduate students in the United States. This group is the focus of a study funded by a 2011–12 ALA Diversity Research Grant. Through an online survey and virtual focus groups, this research[2] seeks to discover the information needs and barriers of Southeast Asian refugee undergraduates, as well as to understand the role their communities (i.e., family, friends, and community) and libraries play in addressing these information needs.

The study takes into consideration cultural background and recognizes the distinct experiences of refugees. For this reason, Touger Vang, a Hmong refugee and now public librarian, is part of the research team to ensure that culturally appropriate communication and outreach are used. While the study is ongoing, a pre-test has revealed areas to be explored and addressed:

• issues of cultural identity,
• academic aspirations,
• influences involved in the decision to attend university,
• knowledge about college,
• difficulties with studies, and
• self-motivation in choosing and succeeding as a student.

Librarians in public, school, and academic libraries will benefit from the results of the study, which will enable them to assess the services and resources that libraries can offer to ensure that they provide equitable access to information. Other professionals and academic services supporting the higher education needs of refugees will also benefit from understanding their needs, allowing them to assess their own services and develop appropriate ones.

Digital volunteer humanitarian aid organizations: The European refugee crisis—Chris Hagar, San Jose State University, and Joyce Monsees, Standby Task Force

Historically, humanitarian aid volunteers needed to be in a physical space, to be on the ground at the point of a crisis to help. Now, "digital volunteers" with Internet access, mobile communication, and global interaction are able to mobilize to support crisis response and humanitarian efforts. Volunteers situated all over the globe, who could be thousands of miles away from the location of a crisis, gather, aggregate, and process information to solve real-world crisis problems.[3] These volunteers are part of various organizations that provide data for "collective intelligence," including crisis mapping that is useful on the ground to local responders. This could be, for example, identifying the location of shelters, medical help, food and water, and open transportation routes.

Chris Hagar works with one such organization, the Standby Task Force (SBTF),[4] a global, volunteer humanitarian organization that manages digital volunteers (18,000 based in more than 100 countries) into a prepared network ready to collaborate online and to provide information to various agencies (e.g., United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs).

Students from the San Jose State University (SJSU) iSchool have volunteered with SBTF, and former SJSU iSchool student Joyce Monsees is a member of the SBTF Core Team. SBTF responded to new challenges when they were commissioned by an international nonprofit agency, Internews,[5] whose mission is to empower local media worldwide to give people news and information they need to enable them to make their voices heard. SBTF's charge was to collect information concerning the European refugee crisis, described as the "biggest refugee and migration crisis since World War II."[6]

SBTF tracked information flows for refugees traveling along the Turkey-Balkans-Germany route and identified information gaps that were negatively impacting refugees traveling along the route with the aim of setting up information centers along the route and to create better information systems and help refugees arriving in Europe access services, understand their rights, and stay safe.

Memory keeping: Documenting the history of refugees—Trishanjit Kaur, Punjabi University

The Partition of India was the separation of India on August 14, 1947, and August 15, 1947, into the states of the Dominion of Pakistan and the Union of India, respectively. The partition produced the largest movement of population in the world, an estimated 14 million people were displaced and about 2 million died, as Muslims in India fled to Pakistan and Hindus in Pakistan fled to India. Women suffered the most as they were raped, abducted, tortured, and subjected themselves to honor killings by jumping into wells and fires to save themselves from being dishonored. The painful incidents of separation of families, which still haunt many in their old age, need to be documented for future generations before they all pass away.

Many efforts are being made, including the one I am a part of named The 1947 Partition Archive, which has been preserving oral histories of the Partition witnesses since 2010.[7] More than 3,000 stories have been preserved on digital video from 320 cities in 12 countries across the world in different

languages. It plans to record 10,000 stories by end of 2017.

Students are recruited as Story Scholars to conduct the interviews. Libraries can play a significant role in preserving the memories of refugees, which I discovered while interviewing refugee women. There should be collaboration between nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and libraries. Basic information about volunteers, housing, education, medical care, job opportunities, and NGOs can be compiled and made accessible by the libraries. LIS educators can teach memory practices and play a vital role in sensitizing future library and information professionals to plan and provide library services to refugees and asylum seekers.

Libraries in the lives of African refugees resettled in the state of Missouri—Musa Wakhungu Olaka, University of Kansas, and Charles Agai Yier, University of Iowa

Between 1975 and 2017, the U.S. government resettled 370,549 African refugees across almost all its 50 states. A small fraction of this population has been resettled in Missouri, and a couple agencies have helped these refugees integrate in American society, but the role of the library, an established public good, has remained unclear. Our research seeks to establish how refugees from Eastern and Central parts of Africa, who have been resettled in a small town in Missouri, access information they need and make use of libraries. It also explores how libraries have tried to help them.

Almost all of these refugees had lived in rural settings most of their lives, including in refugee camps where access to published information was sparse and libraries were almost nonexistent. Most of these refugees have been survivors of genocide, victims of torture, or other prolonged human rights abuses. Some have been refugees in as many as four countries because of armed conflict.

This is a qualitative study that employs a snowball approach to recruit 24 refugees to be interviewed to elicit critical incidents in their lives regarding how they access information, use libraries, and how libraries support them and their families.

Preliminary findings indicate that most of the refugees first used a functional library in the United States. There is a difference in the way those who came in the United States as children and those who arrived as adults access current information. Most of the refugees make most use of the library within the first two years of arrival in the United States. Supporting children of refugees with homework was cited as the biggest contribution libraries have had on refugee families. Libraries have limited international language or bilingual materials that refugees could use to accelerate the learning of English and integration in American society.

Conclusion

Academic libraries can play an important role in supporting research about refugees and asylum seekers by acquiring relevant collections and collecting primary materials when possible. The teaching about and study of these groups can also be supported by libraries as they provide guides to library resources and information literacy instruction about how to identify and evaluate sources.

Engagement with students and faculty about these timely issues can also be important outreach activities. Book talks including international students from the country that a book discusses can be helpful in expanding awareness. The library could invite international students to suggest a book about their country and then participate in a discussion about the book. The same approach could work with international movies. Exhibits highlighting resources on these topics can be educational and hopefully lead students to learn more about these topics. Librarians can work with faculty to collect original materials about refugees and asylum seekers by collecting digital stories that can then be archived and available for research and education.

includes an online exhibition, Poetry and Prayer, featuring Islamic illumination and calligraphy. *Access:* http://art.thewalters.org/browse/category/islamic-manuscripts/.

• **Manuscript Art.** A wide-ranging and well-organized look at manuscript art by scholar Jesse Hurlburt. *Access:* http://jessehurlbut.net/wp/mssart/.

• **Medieval Bestiary.** Creatures mundane and mythical populate the pages of illuminated manuscripts, and this illustrated website, based on ancient and medieval texts, provides essential information should you ever encounter a bonnacon or want to harvest a mandrake. *Access:* http://bestiary.ca/.

• **Metropolitan Museum of Art, Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History.** Search for "illuminated manuscripts" to discover essays and illuminations covering a range of centuries and cultural traditions. *Access:* http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/.

• **Polonsky Foundation Catalogue of Digitised Hebrew Manuscripts.** This British Library project allows you to explore featured content and themes in an extensive collection, as well as read articles and watch videos. *Access:* https://www.bl.uk/hebrew-manuscripts.

• **Sexy Codicology.** Giulio Menna and Marjolein de Vos, both of Leiden University, maintain this informative and beautifully illustrated blog. *Access:* https://sexycodicology.net/blog/.

Sexy Codicology
A World of Illuminated Manuscripts and Medieval Books

Sexy Codicology. Permission: Giulio Menna and Marjolein de Vos

• **The Iris: Behind the Scenes at the Getty.** Search for "illuminated manuscripts" to uncover blog posts and podcasts about items from the Getty collection. *Access:* https://blogs.getty.edu/iris/.

• **Treasures of Islamic Manuscript Painting from the Morgan.** An online exhibition showcasing beautiful illuminations, many from the Middle Ages. *Access:* http://www.themorgan.org/collection/treasures-of-islamic-manuscript-painting.

• **YouTube.** Search for "medieval manuscripts" to retrieve a host of videos by institutions like the Getty and renowned experts like Christopher de Hamel. Many videos demonstrate the painstaking process of creating a manuscript as it was done in the Middle Ages. *Access:* https://www.youtube.com/. ℥

Academic librarians could also invite public librarians to share with library staff and others in the university community the work they are doing and see if there are ways to collaborate and provide support. Where appropriate, they might provide refugees access to needed information that the public library does not have available, such as books in a variety of languages. Academic libraries might also collaborate with community organizations to be certain that relevant information about local activities is being preserved and archived for future researchers.

The authors in this column provide some examples of research and good practices that academic libraries can undertake to support refugees and asylum seekers. While much of this is similar to what libraries do to support all users and potential users, the needs of refugees and asylum seekers can be challenging and require commitment, collaboration, and creative thinking.

Notes

1. Project Welcome, https://publish.illinois.edu/projectwelcome.

2. https://diversityinfoneeds.wordpress.com.

3. K. Starbird, "Digital volunteerism: Examining connected crowd work during mass disruption events," in Proceedings of the Computer Human Interaction Conference 2012, May 5–10, 2012, in Austin, Texas.