

Open Shelves: Providing Academic Library Space to Sanctuary Seekers

Luc Edwards & Anna Fallgren

About Us



Luc Edwards
(he/him)

- 3.5 years experience in public and academic library settings, including helping sanctuary seekers with enquiries & signposting resources.
- **Fun Fact:** I help run a weekly free poetry club in Egham!



Anna Fallgren
(she/her)

- 15 years experience in public and academic library settings
- **Fun Fact:** I take part in our local park run every week, I can do this because I have a metal pin in my knee. 😊

Sanctuary Library Membership



- 9am – 9pm daily access to the Library
 - Wi-Fi
 - Powered study spaces
 - Full physical catalogue, including a wellbeing & reading for pleasure collection.
- Borrow up to 10 books at a time
- Free of charge, no late fees
 - RHUL Library uses auto-renewals, so items are only recalled if requested.
 - Sanctuary library members are not liable for late return fees on recalled items.

Our Legacy

Cambridge
Engalnd
November 16th, 1940

Dear Mrs. Hook:

I hope this hastily written account has not been boring. I wanted to suggest to you how we use our money. This large gift will make it more possible for me to ~~an spare~~ spare more of my salary for refugee scholars who are interned in this country.

Letter from Susan Stebbing to financial donor, 1940.

Stebbing was the first woman to be appointed to full professorship in 1933 (Bedford College).

I can do at the moment is to tell you about one or two of the children. Heinz Rosenbaum has been with us just over a year. He was six when he came. His father, a Jew, had been in Dachau concentration camp; he managed to get out and come to this country, a complete nervous wreck. We do not know what had been happening to Heinz, but he was terrified. He would scarcely speak, never smiled, and shrank away in terror from all strangers. Now he has begun to talk to grown-ups, and sometimes to smile, and he looks likely to ~~xxxxxx~~ ~~xxxx~~ become a cheerful child in time. I notice the difference when I go home in the vacations. We have two children whom we have wholly adopted, one from Prague, and one from Vienna, who have been with us for two years. They are now both of them merry children. We have a Polish girl, aged 15 now, who came to us nearly two years ago; she is Jewish; her father was killed. She is in a very nervous state but she is happily settled at the school. I do not know the exact numbers, as I am away from home, but I believe we have at least 50 foreign children, most of whom have scarcely any money, and some have no parents.

Of course we have English children as well, and are indeed supposed to be an English School. Some of them pay no fees at all - since the war, because their parents have lost their means of livelihood in one way or another. They are of varied kinds, some of these parents are clergy with minute incomes, some business men, some serving in the forces. Some children have no fathers and their mothers have tiny incomes.

We also have three "mothers" no living in our village - and having their expenses from us - because they have had their homes in London bombed.

I hope this hastily written account has not been boring. I wanted to suggest to you how we use our money. This large gift will make it more possible for me to ~~an spare~~ spare more of my salary for refugee scholars who are interned in this country.

I wish I could tell you all how this letter and this gift have suddenly made to-day bright.

Yours, sincerely,

L. Susan Stebbing

A University of Social Purpose

Modern Goals

- Aligning with RH2030s strategy – civic-minded & globally-engaged.
- University of Sanctuary
 - Sanctuary Scholarship – Supporting sanctuary seekers into university education
 - Research and teaching about forced migration
- How can the library support this goal?
 - Demystify higher education
 - Open doors
 - Encourage curiosity



Method

Developing and sharing the scheme

How we launched it!



1. Research

- Contact with other universities – many thanks to Leeds, Sussex and Sheffield!
- Considering equivalent schemes – what worked for others might not work for us

2. Project proposal

- Proposed by User Experience Coordinator to Library Director

3. Full concept

- Supporting material – Rules and regulations, Messaging to external groups, Website copy
- Documented processes – Based on existing processes for familiarity

4. Team communication

- Addressing questions and concerns
- Amended & iterated plans based on team feedback
- Clearly communicated processes through team manual, email and meeting

5. Going live & promoting scheme

- Sharing with charities and nonprofit groups
- Learning from mistakes and growing scheme based on conversations & feedback.

Roadblocks & Mistakes

Pre-Launch

Initial Launch

Post-Launch Review

Reluctance

- Concerns about lost books that would not have been raised for a paid user
 - Challenged by identifying the double standard during discussion.
- High requirements for proof of ID
 - Identified what ID was needed, and what was excessive.

Outreach

- Finding users that would benefit
 - Faced by reaching out to charities and sanctuary seeker organisations in the immediate area.
 - Created a spreadsheet to track who we had spoken to, and whether they were interested.
- Communicating with charities
 - Learned to be clear with what our offer is, and how we can help.
 - Listened very closely to what organisations thought, what issues they could see & what we could do to improve the offer.

Limitations

- Distance
 - Limited offer to users in the immediate area around the library, reducing potential users.
 - Removed limitation after slow initial take-up.
- Referral pathway
 - Initially only allowed users to refer through a charity.
 - Caused more work for charities, who did not want to take it on, and more work for the potential member to find someone willing to refer.
 - Created a self-referral pathway, after the referral pathway was questioned by Refugee Education UK.

Raising Awareness



- Reached out to 20+ organisations
 - Internal – Student societies, wider staff University of Sanctuary network, comms teams...
 - Local – Muslim community group, church, neighbouring towns' R/AS groups...
 - Regional – County-wide & London-based groups
 - National – Migrant Help UK, Refugee Education UK, STAR...
- Organised calls to share scheme and to learn more
 - Gained valuable information and contacts through this
 - Information sharing and connections will be vital for getting people to hear about your scheme.
 - Charities are excited about schemes like this – willing to spare an hour to discuss.
- Where organisations did not respond, kept track and recontacted when scheme was further along to invite to a university tour.

Unexpected Benefits

- The journey from idea to a new type of Library membership provided us with a learning opportunity.
- A new awareness of the challenges and trauma experienced by refugees and asylum seekers. We wanted to read about this!
- The idea of creating a Reading List on Refugee Justice came from our conversations with our student community.
- Brought the idea to the Library IDEA (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity & Accessibility) Group, who manage reading lists. They supported the idea, so the books were purchased, using the Reading for Pleasure budget.



Going Forwards...

Our next steps

Embedding Values

Staff

- Connecting with wider staff
 - University of Sanctuary Staff Group
 - IT & Internal Comms
- Events
 - Connecting the Sector (Migrant Help UK)
 - University visits for charities/nonprofits

Students

- Reading list
- Student Union Groups – After exam season!
 - Amnesty
 - Friends of Palestine
 - STAR (Student Action for Refugees)
- Refugee Week (w/c 15th June): book display promoting new reading list & related content on Library Instagram



Thank you!

Any questions?

Think of a question later?
Email us!

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