

Providing school library
services to refugees,
asylum seekers and
immigrant students.

Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle.

As students adjust to life in a new country, a school library can be a safe and quiet space for them to use technology, find resources and connect with students and staff.

Show caring through materials as well as training

School libraries should have physical or online materials available in students' home languages where possible.

Staff need to be culturally sensitive and supportive to all students using the space.

Finding appropriate materials can be challenging

At my school the majority of students transitioning to life in the U.S. are Spanish speakers and even these materials can be hard to find. Specifically it can be difficult to find materials that are culturally and age-appropriate for students as many materials are just translations of English language titles.

Finding books in other languages can be a challenge

At some schools in Chicago, more than 20 different languages are spoken by students. It can become cost-prohibitive to have materials in all students' home languages.

In this case, it makes sense to have hi-low books in English available as well as to leverage technology.

Leveraging technology

For example, school librarians can:

- Develop lists of online resources in students' home languages.
- Learn how to use tools like the google translation app to help ease communication barriers.
- Include multi-cultural materials in the library collection.
- Reach out to community organizations to have supports

Leveraging technology continued

- Learn about translation tools available in library databases.
- Talk to leaders in immigrant and refugee communities about what resources will be relevant and useful for students to access
- Offer classes on how to use technology to students and parents.
- Find out what users' needs are and dedicate time and budget to meeting those needs. .

Reach out to ELL teachers

Include the school library on a school tour for new students. Work with ELL teachers and talk about library resources so that students know about this school resource.

Don't assume that students have been exposed to the idea of public or school libraries before.

As leaders of professional development in schools

Librarians can share guides with staff on how to make schools a safe space for immigrant and refugee children.

An excellent guide is available through teachingtolerance.org. <http://tinyurl.com/h3ns9of>

Students may be at very different levels

Some students may have interrupted education or may have attended poorly resourced schools and may not have fully formed literacy skills in their first languages. This will make it harder to build literacy and language skills in English. Each child has had a different experience.

Truama

Many students who are refugees or seeking asylum have lived through traumatic situations and therefore school staff needs to be careful about tone of voice, physical contact, as well as situations that could trigger students. Every students is different and needs to be cared for as an individual.

Non-refugee students

As you learn how to meet the needs of students new to the U.S., think of how you can support other students in the school in making it a welcoming environment for ALL students.

Lead by example to help make schools a safe space for everyone.