

# Takam Tikou

The online review of children's books and reading - Africa - Arab World - Caribbean - Indian Ocean

## "If I were a bird, I would reunite my children and fly far from here" ...

### In the United States, a summit on refugee library actions

By **Michael Dowling**, Director of the Bureau of International Relations, American Library Association (ALA)  
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**In 2016, the American Library Association (ALA) created the "Project Welcome" for libraries to best meet the needs of refugees and asylum seekers. Michael Dowling presents the project as well as flagship actions by libraries in the United States and elsewhere - actions highlighted at a summit held in Chicago in February 2017, which emphasized the need to work in partnership with organizations for the reception of refugees.**

The words of Emma Lazarus sonnet "The New Colossus", engraved at the foot of the Statue of Liberty in New York Bay, still ring true for the dozen Central African refugees recently landed in Chicago: *Give me your poor, your exhausted, tight-knit people long to live free ...* These refugees, like the millions of others who made the long journey to the United States before them, were fleeing their war-ravaged country, seeking what humanity whole desire - safety and a future for them and for their children. But what will be their future in the United States?

We know the largest migration since the <sup>Second</sup> World War, with more than 65 million internally displaced people, of which more than 21 million are considered refugees, according to the latest reports of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (<http://www.unhcr.org/fr/apercu-statistique.html>).

We see images of Syrian refugees and various African countries who are risking their lives on their way to Europe are constantly on television and computer screens. What we show less is the work that institutions, associations and individuals do to assist newly arrived refugees and asylum seekers.

## Libraries, refugees and asylum seekers: the "Project Welcome"

In its Resolution for the Rights of Immigrants (<http://www.ala.org/advocacy/advocacy/diversity/libraries-respond-immigrants-refugees-and-asylum-seekers>), the American Library Association (ALA) recognizes immigrants as strong and important members of the social fabric of the nation, and its Bill of Rights ( *ALA* (<http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill>) ) indicates that the right of a person to use a library must not be refused or restricted because of his or her origin, age, social background or opinions.

Since 1975, the United States has accepted more than 3 million refugees. Despite the current restrictions, more than 45,000 have been welcomed since October 2016 <sup>1</sup> [#note1].

Libraries around the world can play a significant role in hosting refugees and asylum seekers. In Europe, they have played a key role in welcoming recent refugees and asylum seekers, actively engaging to provide them with resources and services. How can we, librarians in the United States, while having a long experience with migrants, learn from our colleagues in Europe and elsewhere, to better help these new immigrants?



The goal of "Project Welcome" <sup>2</sup> <https://publish.illinois.edu/projectwelcome/> is to study and coordinate the actions that American libraries can take to respond to the information needs of refugees and asylum seekers in order to support them in their settlement and integration process. It assesses the strengths and weaknesses of the current situation, learning from others, including international colleagues and national and international government agencies. It works to formulate recommendations and an action plan for libraries: resources, services, training and research. The underlying principle of the project is that refugees and asylum seekers are welcomed by and in libraries. Armed with a strategic action plan that includes the voices of refugees and asylum seekers,

## The Summit "Libraries at the service of refugees and asylum seekers"

From May 2016, the project organized real and virtual discussion sessions and participated in meetings to inform about the project and to identify library actions, challenges and good practices. All these exchanges fed this Summit, held on February 6, 2017 in Chicago. It was the first national summit bringing together librarians from different US states with people working in refugee reception services. Participants shared their experiences with the world via Twitter (hashtags #projectwelcome #refugeeswelcome and #librariesrespond).

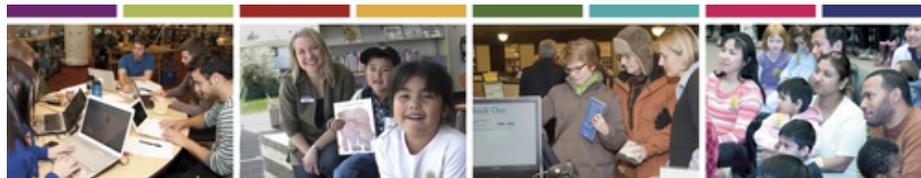
The 70 participants came from libraries, the United Nations Refugee Agency, organizations from the various US and national states dealing with the reception of refugees.

The Summit took place at a moment in time when President Trump's decree <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/01/30/politics/trump-travel-ban-q-and-a/index.html> to prevent refugees from entering the country for 120 days, and immigrants from seven predominantly Muslim countries for three months, came from to be suspended by a federal judge.

## Learn from foreign libraries

The program <https://publish.illinois.edu/projectwelcome/summit/program/> began with a look at the work of libraries in countries that have received large numbers of refugees. For example, in Canada, 51% of Toronto residents were born in another country. Public libraries in this city have collections in 40 languages. Canada has hosted nearly 40,000 Syrian refugees, many of them in Toronto. As Sulekha Sathi's presentation

<http://publish.illinois.edu/projectwelcome/files/2017/02/SSathi-Project-Welcome-Summit-Presentation-Feb-6-2017.pdf> shows, public library staff visit the temporary residences where the refugees are, to get in touch with them and welcome them. The libraries also produced a video <http://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/using-the-library/> presentation in Arabic, French, Mandarin, Tagalog, Punjabi, Russian, Spanish and Urdu.



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For its part, the city of Hamburg - the second largest in Germany - currently hosts 50,000 refugees and asylum seekers. Most of them come from the Near and Middle East. The city's libraries work very closely with the municipal refugee office to help them settle, acclimatize and integrate. Staff set up a working group dedicated to refugee projects. Among their many services, the libraries offer conversation groups to better speak German and opportunities to create a network of knowledge through group outings, exhibitions, conferences ... - see the presentation of Anne Barckow <http://publish.illinois.edu/projectwelcome/files/2017/01/Presentation-Chicago.pdf>.



bvo Grenzenlos lesen Eine Aktion der Bundesverbände Österreichs mit Unterstützung von BUNDESMINISTERIUM FÜR BILDUNG

Poster [<https://www.bvoe.at/sites/default/files/attachments/bvoe15-willkommen-plakat-end.jpg>] produced by the German and Austrian libraries

Finally, collecting the history of refugees is another action that libraries can carry out, with partners, as shown in his presentation [<http://publish.illinois.edu/projectwelcome/files/2017/02/Chicago-17-3Feb.pdf>] Trishanjit Kaur from the University of Punjabi in India. The "1947 Archive" [<http://www.1947partitionarchive.org/>] preserves since 2010 the oral histories of the witnesses of the Partition of India [[https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Partition\\_des\\_Indes](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Partition_des_Indes)] in 1947: more than 3000 stories are thus available in video.

## American initiatives

Touger Vang, of the Yolo County Public Library in California, is one of thousands of Hmong refugees who arrived from Laos in the United States in the 1980s as a result of the Vietnam War. He recounted his arrival and the great importance of librarians and libraries in his new life. He chose to become a librarian himself, and now he is helping other refugees. He emphasized that each culture is different and that librarians must try to understand as much as possible the culture of the people for whom they create the services: what works very well for people of a certain culture may not work for other cultures. He also suggested encouraging new immigrants to become librarians,

Regarding the role of school libraries, MaryAnne Confer's presentation

[<http://publish.illinois.edu/projectwelcome/files/2017/01/ppptx.pdf>] (complemented by the article in *American Libraries Magazine* [<https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/2017/02/14/resources-for-resettlement/>]) showcased the actions of his library in Chicago. The author argues that school libraries should provide print and digital materials in students' mother tongues when possible, but recognize that it is often not easy to find these books and sometimes to be able to pay their prices. This is one of the reasons why partnerships are important, such as that of its library with the Chicago Public Library. Ms. Confer recalls the importance of simple things, such as showing the library when the newcomers go to school: "Depending on the country they come from, they may not have the experience of public libraries or school ". She adds that teachers must also pay attention to the volume of the voice,

## The role of organizations dedicated to the reception of refugees

The most important part of the Summit was the sharing of information and knowledge between refugee hosting organizations and librarians. They need to know more about the refugee reception process and the support they receive from different organizations. Thus, after a presentation on the functioning of the World Program of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the communication of the

coordinator of the Office for the reception of refugees and immigrants in Illinois

[<http://publish.illinois.edu/projectwelcome/files/2017/02/U.S.-and-ILLINOIS-REFUGEE-RESETTLEMENT-PROGRAM-for-Feb-6-2017.pdf>] has provided sometimes surprising statistics: if in the 1980s and 1990s the arrivals came from a small number of countries, today they come from more than 60 different countries. He reinforced Touger Vang's message about the importance for librarians to learn more about the cultures of newcomers. He also explained the protocols followed by US agencies for the settlement of refugees. Most of the librarians present were unaware that the help given to refugees by the US government was so limited. Reception and placement last only 90 days. Then the refugees are essentially left to their fate.

Next, NGOs working directly with refugees to best prepare for their arrival in the United States, and those involved in settling, provided information and training to refugees. It was very useful for librarians to know more about these NGOs. Stakeholders shared the information needs of refugees and suggested ways in which libraries can help in this regard. These suggestions did not surprise librarians: books, including audio books in English and in the languages spoken by refugees, computers, meeting rooms, English classes, help finding jobs and to improve the skills needed to obtain jobs and directions to access available resources in their host city. And of course, to give a library card.

## The actions of American libraries: ideas, good practices, research

The Summit also allowed American librarians to share their experiences and research through poster presentations. Here are some examples:

- Of workshops with the new arrivals with the residents of the city to create stories on video  
[<http://publish.illinois.edu/projectwelcome/files/2017/02/Poster2ofor2oSummit.pdf>] : Pittsburgh (Pennsylvania), a divide has developed between the new residents and old. The library has developed a project to reduce this fracture  
[<http://publish.illinois.edu/projectwelcome/files/2017/02/Poster2ofor2oSummit.pdf>] : five new immigrants or refugees are reunited with five former residents whose families were also immigrants or refugees, for a four-day workshop in the library. They write and record their story and add photos and create short videos. This helps newcomers develop a sense of pride and belonging that will help strengthen their civic engagement. These videos will then be used in focus groups organized by the city to help residents become aware of their social and civic responsibility, whether towards immigrants or in general.
- The multiple actions of the "New Americans" [<http://publish.illinois.edu/projectwelcome/files/2017/02/WChan2oDPL2oPoster.pdf>] " project: this project of the libraries of Denver (Colorado) is the point of immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers can develop strategies to carry out their personal projects and integrate into their host city. It is a multi-faceted program: out-of-the-wall action, communication, informational literacy and community engagement to help the library connect with new populations in the Denver area.
- The creation of a full-time leadership position at the library to work with refugees and other immigrants: in Kansas City, Kansas, the library network created this position in 2014. The person hired for this new " Service for refugees and immigrants" [<http://www.kclibrary.org/services/immigrant-services>] » Established partnerships with refugee agencies, medical centers, schools, social services, local associations and other less-expected institutions, such as an art museum, to reach out to refugees . An advisory committee has been set up to help get in touch with this population and help in the planning and implementation of actions - today, the committee is made up of 40% immigrants. Two young volunteers of the civic service joined this team and a foundation was created to help finance the many actions. Among them, one can see for example the web page giving useful links [<http://www.moneysmartkc.org/portfolio-items/immigrant-services/>] : help for legal questions, learning English, employment, social services ...
- Book selections around refugee children [<http://publish.illinois.edu/projectwelcome/files/2017/02/CorapizoMcCaffrey2oPoster.pdf>] : TWO Trinity International and Governors State University teachers in Illinois have made a selection of 56 recent books, most of them highly illustrated, for children and teens. These carefully chosen titles (using among others the selections of the American section of IBBY, USBBY) reflect the diverse, traumatic experiences of refugee children from different countries. The aim is that librarians and other adults can offer these books to young migrants who can identify with the characters but also to all other young people, to help them better understand the experiences of young refugees and the fact that This is a frequent phenomenon, affecting many others than themselves.

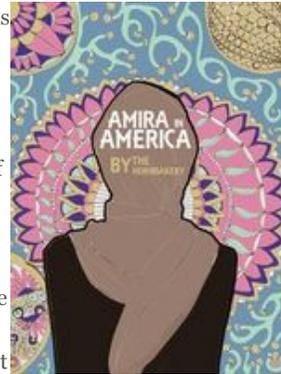


Video [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UnvpXDqBis&feature=youtu.be>]

© Denver Library



- The creation of a publication (comics, coloring, resources) to help young refugees: students from the University of Maryland created the comic (downloadable and printable) *Amira in America* [<https://thehornbakery.tumblr.com/>], with a focus on young people and their psychic health - the authors studied the issues of post-traumatic stress and depression in young refugees and how it is possible to help these young people. Indeed, as this presentation [<http://publish.illinois.edu/projectwelcome/files/2017/02/Poster-Amira-In-America.pdf>] indicates, 33% of refugee children suffer from psychological disorders and nearly 80% of young people aged 6 to 17 who require psychological treatment do not receive it. Recall that Syrian refugees have been particularly present in the American press recently, both for the increase of their number in the United States and as a subject of debate at the time of the 2016 presidential election.
- The use of graphic novels to help refugees adapt to their new environment: a study [<http://publish.illinois.edu/projectwelcome/files/2017/02/Mumah-Img20of20poster-copy-2.jpg>] from the University of North Texas explains that graphic novels and comics help young people to read better and tackle difficult topics such as the Holocaust (*Maus* [<http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb434814864>]) or the Iranian revolution (*Persepolis* [<http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb45006598j>]), and suggests that libraries could help young refugees to adapt to their new lives, by organizing meetings around graphic novels in various cultural universes.
- The study of the behavior of refugees not accustomed to libraries in relation to information needs: A professor from the University of North Carolina Aiken studied the case of refugees from the Central African Republic [[http://publish.illinois.edu/projectwelcome/files/2017/02/Bowdoin\\_poster\\_Project20Welcome20201720Large\\_FINAL.pdf](http://publish.illinois.edu/projectwelcome/files/2017/02/Bowdoin_poster_Project20Welcome20201720Large_FINAL.pdf)] in Massachusetts and Georgia. They are among the most disadvantaged among those arriving in the United States; most of them speak only Sango, have a very brief education and have worked only in subsistence agriculture. It is essential to understand exactly the nature of their information needs and the extent to which these needs are being met. One of these people said, "If I were a bird, I would reunite my children and fly away from here" ... Another study [<http://publish.illinois.edu/projectwelcome/files/2017/02/musa.jpg>], conducted by librarians at the universities of Kansas and Iowa, examines refugees from Somalia and countries in the Great Lakes region (Rwanda, Burundi, DRC) who have also lived in rural areas without access to libraries. The study shows the importance of audiovisual materials for learning English in the library, the need for more action outside the walls, more collaboration with refugee organizations and more services helping to find jobs.



## Perspectives: the "Project Welcome" Guide

In its second year, the project is now working on a Guide with ideas and resources to assist public libraries in their work with refugees and to inform all citizens about refugee issues. The guide will be aimed at all public library staff and their partner institutions and associations. Libraries must not act alone; they can understand the needs of refugees and respond to them if they work with refugee organizations, specialized libraries in different cultures and refugees themselves. The Guide will have four sections: "understanding and learning", "collaborating and working in partnership",

The cornerstone of the Guide is its inclusive and sustainable approach. Refugee library services should not be designed unilaterally but should respond to the needs of refugees. These services are at the heart of the library: they are not a simple addition. For example, services for newcomers and immigrants already meet many of the needs of refugees. Depending on the case, specific programs may be created "tailored", such as those helping to overcome trauma.

Project Welcome recommends an approach integrating services for refugees and non-refugees. This approach should aim at multilingualism, working with librarians engaging with populations, sharing information with relevant organizations through diverse and appropriate media, acting against exclusion, being interactive and participatory.

## Notes and references

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This table [\[https://image.slidesharecdn.com/9eca2a0b-0d42-4751-8f51-497804aa3326-150806175336-1va1-app6891/95/refugee-data-8-638.jpg?cb=1438883791\]](https://image.slidesharecdn.com/9eca2a0b-0d42-4751-8f51-497804aa3326-150806175336-1va1-app6891/95/refugee-data-8-638.jpg?cb=1438883791) shows refugee admissions, by region of origin, from 1975 to May 2017. † [\[#1\]](#)

2

It is conducted jointly by the Mortenson Center for International Library Programs [\[http://www.library.illinois.edu/mortenson/\]](http://www.library.illinois.edu/mortenson/) (University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana) and ALA ( Office of International Relations [\[http://www.ala.org/offices/iro\]](http://www.ala.org/offices/iro) and ODLOS [\[http://www.ala.org/offices/diversity\]](http://www.ala.org/offices/diversity) Office ). Funded by the government agency Institute of Museum and Library Services [\[https://www.imls.gov/\]](https://www.imls.gov/) for a period of one year ending in April 2017, the project has been extended by one year to go beyond planning and create a guide for librarians. † [\[#2\]](#)

## For further Michael Dowling

After studying Information Science at the University of Maryland, Michael Dowling worked in a university library in Tokyo and then ran the public library in Monroe, Wisconsin. He has served as Deputy Executive Director of the Reference and User Services Association, and since 2001 has been Director of the American Library Association (ALA) Chapter Relations and International Relations Offices.

## The American Library Association [\[http://www.ala.org/\]](http://www.ala.org/) (ALA)

Founded in 1876, it is the oldest and largest association of librarians in the world. It has 57,000 members: librarians, library administrators, and other interested people from all states of the United States and other countries. It serves public, state, school and university libraries, as well as specialized libraries for people working in government, commerce and industry, the arts and the military, as well as in hospitals, prisons and other institutions. You can read (in English) his 2016 annual report [\[http://www.ala.org/aboutala/sites/ala.org/aboutala/files/content/ala-annual-report-2016-for-web-accessible.pdf\]](http://www.ala.org/aboutala/sites/ala.org/aboutala/files/content/ala-annual-report-2016-for-web-accessible.pdf) and follow his Facebook page. [\[https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=american%20library%20association\]](https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=american%20library%20association)

Among other specialized "divisions", ALA has an " Association for Library Service to Children" [\[http://www.ala.org/alsc/\]](http://www.ala.org/alsc/) And a Young Adult Library Services Association [\[http://www.ala.org/yalsa/\]](http://www.ala.org/yalsa/) whose websites (also in English) are a mine of information and ideas.