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LIBR 506
December 8, 2019
Design Project: Libricycle

Introduction

The Libricycle is a bicycle and trailer to be created and supported by local libraries in Vancouver and the Lower Mainland in British Columbia in order to connect with refugees in the region. As a mobile operation, the Libricycle can travel to gathering places, parks, community events, and elsewhere when invited. The Libricycle is designed to transport a flexible and evolving collection.

The Libricycle trailer can carry rotating materials from the library's collection in response to community-articulated needs. A library could begin with children's books in Arabic and English, information related to immigration and settlement, and a mobile hotspot. The Libricycle trailer can be customized with the library's branding and name in appropriate languages so that it is recognizable on the street. The trailer provides waterproof protection for transporting materials year-round. Libraries are encouraged to hire staff who speak relevant languages, such as Arabic, to ride the bike and represent the library in the community; this could be a person who came to B.C. as a refugee themselves.

The Libricycle design is informed by the insights of information researchers that, during resettlement, refugees are disconnected from their accustomed ways of knowing, and therefore may struggle to know where to look for trustworthy sources of information.

By dynamically serving community members in their own information grounds, sharing information in refugees' languages, and seeking reciprocal relationships with refugees as patrons and community members, libraries can use the Libricycle to support displaced people in adjusting to their new homes in a dignified way.

Part I. Importance of Reaching and Building Reciprocal Relationships with Refugees

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Refugees in the Vancouver Area

When we set out to design an information service for newcomers to Canada, we knew we needed to narrow down to a specific group. We decided to focus on understanding the information needs of people who are refugees in Vancouver, with an expansive definition of "refugee." We felt it was important to take into consideration the demographic information available about those who have refugee status in B.C., for this would help us understand the user group. However, we feel it is important that the designed solutions not be limited to those with that status.

Between November 2015 and December 2016, approximately 3,600 Syrian government-assisted refugees were settled by the Canadian government in Vancouver and the Lower Mainland; 1,952 of these refugees were settled by the Immigrant Services Society of B.C. Most lived in refugee camps for 3-5 years preceding their migration to Canada, and many do not speak English or French (Immigrant Services Society of B.C., 2017).

Not everyone who comes to Canada fleeing persecution receives government assistance. Others are not recognized with refugee status at all. Caidi, Ghaddar, and Allard (2017) argue that the classes of migration presented to libraries and others providing services to refugees can obfuscate the fact that people who come to Canada as "economic" or "family" migrants may also be fleeing persecution. Only those whose persecution is currently recognized as valid by the Canadian government are allowed to migrate as part of the "humanitarian" class, which comes with resources to support their settlement. The authors state that "these categories serve bureaucratic and legal ends in a manner that harms and excludes people," and they urge librarians to avoid uncritically accepting the logic of this migration classification (p. 401).

The Libricycle was designed with an expansive definition of refugee in mind. The service prioritizes reaching people who have fled persecution, regardless of their status. In order to understand the unique information needs and context of those fleeing

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persecution, we drew on Lloyd's (2016) differentiation between those who migrate for economic reasons and those whose migration is forced, and how those differences affect each group's ability to access information (p. 37). For refugees, information experience in the receiving country is affected by a "disrupted biography" that comes about due to a lack of statehood or challenges to identity or status, being unemployed and in poverty, and experiencing isolation as a result of language barriers.

Fractured Information Landscape

Lloyd (2016) introduced the idea of a fractured information landscape. When migrating involuntarily, people leave behind their networks and ways of knowing and transition to a new information landscape (p. 39). In order to reconstruct the information landscape in the new society, people go through a process of coming to understand what information is valued, as well as

how to determine sources that will enable transition and support resettlement allowing integration to happen; and to understand how information is produced, reproduced, circulated and made accessible; what and whose information can be trusted; and how to evaluate credibility. (p. 40)

When refugees are recently arrived, they may be in a liminal zone, "a threshold or initial stage of a process" (p. 40). In this initial period of adjustment to Canada, public libraries can support refugees by providing information that is relevant to this stage (p. 41).

The fractured information landscape concept explains that recently arrived refugees may experience barriers to accessing information through traditional means. Libraries can work to remove these barriers by providing relevant information, building relationships and trust with refugees, and being open to reciprocal exchanges with the people they seek to serve.

Social Capital

Building social capital is an important part of reconstructing the information landscape. Varheim (2011) found that libraries, through programming designed for newcomers, are spaces where social capital and trust of government institutions can be built. Adkins, Moulaison Sandy, & Derpic (2017) found that even when newcomers would not seek information for their own needs through the library, they would use the library to support their children's educational needs (p. 250).

This same study identified ways that social capital is often built outside of libraries, including at houses of worship and other "information grounds" for newcomers. That is, churches were one type of gathering place in which:

an environment [is] temporarily created by the behaviour of people who have come together to perform a given task, but from which emerges a social atmosphere that fosters the spontaneous and serendipitous sharing of information. (Pettigrew, 1999, p. 811)

Newcomers went to churches for Spanish-language services, as well as for different classes and emotional and spiritual support. Here, they would also share "practical advice and connections for health resources" and assistance (Adkins, Moulaison Sandy, & Derpic, 2017, p. 249). Becoming an accessible resource at such places of worship and other information grounds can be a way for libraries to build connections and trust with refugees and support them in the process of reconstructing their information landscapes.

Two-Way Exchange

When developing programs that serve refugees, libraries need to be intentional about their approach. Caidi, Ghaddar, and Allard (2017) caution that libraries need to be mindful of perpetuating a one-way exchange and viewing refugees as "the not-quite-citizen who must be taught our values, language, and culture" (p. 402). Instead, they argue, information professionals need to be open to integrating with and

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adapting to the values, language, and culture of refugees who are part of their communities.

The Working Together Project (WTP) provides a blueprint for libraries and communities to work together. The WTP was a three-year project funded by Vancouver Public Libraries to “develop methods to work with low-income communities through a community development approach” (2008, p. 4). The WTP produced a toolkit to guide and inspire libraries to approach many aspects of librarianship from a community-led framework. The toolkit is a valuable resource for libraries seeking to build two-way exchanges. For example, WTP presents eight steps in collection development that honor the community a project services: establishing relationships in the community, gauging interest, assessing needs, critiquing the collection, selecting and acquiring materials, evaluating constantly, celebrating, and continuing to involve the community (pp. 106-109).

As a starting point, libraries can provide information related to immigration status—such as hearings and online forms—as well as basic needs like securing housing, jobs, and job-related skills such as speaking English. But as they do so, libraries should be wary of perpetuating one-way exchanges that focus solely on instilling Canadian values and language.

What Libraries are Offering Now

Reviewing the websites of public libraries in the areas where government-assisted Syrian refugees were settled by ISSBC in 2015-2016, we can see that libraries are attempting to meet the information needs of refugees or of newcomers more generally. Some focus more on the nuts and bolts of settlement, others emphasize learning English, and others are developing their collections to be more culturally inclusive. There may be additional initiatives that are not visible on their websites.

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Vancouver Public Library has a LibGuide on Refugee Support. This includes information about making a refugee claim and preparing for a hearing; links with information about housing support, health care, and other programs and services for refugees in Vancouver; and names of community-based organizations that advocate for and support refugees. There is also a page for Settlement Support, which includes additional information for refugees and other immigrants, largely to support assimilation. Burnaby Public Library takes a similar approach, and also details services that refugees can access at the library, including using computers, Wi-Fi, library tours, presentations by library staff, getting a library card (with the appropriate identification), and learning English.

The Surrey Libraries have a webpage for newcomers, but nothing specific to refugees. Coquitlam Public Library has a webpage for ESL Programs and Services. The Fraser Valley Regional Library features its World Languages Collection as a service “designed to meet the needs of native speakers of a variety of European, Asian, and Middle Eastern languages.” While this collection is stated to include material in Arabic and Farsi, there is no link to the catalogue for these two languages. The website also mentions a Welcome Brochure that is available at their branches. FVRL offers book clubs for English learners and for newcomers.

There appear to be some gaps in the services that libraries are currently offering refugees. Recognizing that fractured information landscapes can keep people out of the library, we think it is important for libraries to consider services that go where the people are. We also argue that services designed for refugees should seek to intentionally create two-way exchanges that both allow refugee communities to access the information they need and allow libraries to adapt to serving new communities.

Part II. The Libricycle

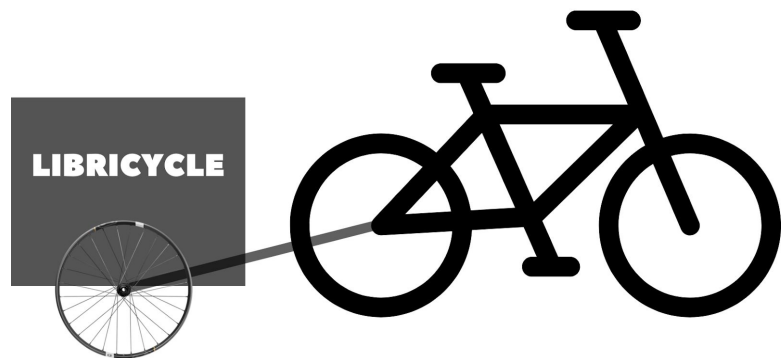
In order to meet the information needs of this population, our proposed concept is a mobile bookbike service called the Libricycle. We started with the concept of a physical space inside a library that could serve as a welcome center for Syrian refugees. We went through different iterations before deciding that in order to ensure that the library's skills and resources are made available to refugees, the service needs to be able to move nimbly through the community, and engage with community members in a two-way exchange or partnership. Thus we designed a low-budget, mobile information service. The collection carried by the bicycle, as well as its route, can and should be flexible and decided upon through a community-led process.

Libricycle Design

The bookbike concept serves as an inspiration for our own Libricycle. Bookbikes are "earth-friendly, human-powered mobile library outposts" (Abel, 2015). Many of these act as mobile libraries, checking books out to patrons at neighborhood

sites and then sending those patrons to library buildings to return the books once they are finished with them. Bookbikes have been implemented by libraries in Los Angeles, Colorado, Phoenix, and many other places throughout the United States and Canada. In British Columbia, North Vancouver and Burnaby libraries have already bought and outfitted their own bookbikes (Prest, 2018 and Boothby, 2018).

The Libricycle's features are specific to the climate, terrain, and culture of Vancouver and the Lower Mainland. The Libricycle trailer provides waterproof protection to transport materials year-round. The Libricycle carries an umbrella for the many rainy days in the area, so patrons have a place to take shelter when utilizing the bike's



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resources. The Libricycle trailer will have library branding, to make it easy to spot within the community and for community members to connect the Libricycle's actions with the library where it lives. The trailer carries a mobile hotspot that allows community members to connect to Wi-Fi and enables the rider of the bike to offer library card sign-ups to interested community members.

Libraries have many options for acquiring or creating a Libricycle. The design is flexible so that individual library branches with any budget can confidently create their own Libricycle. Haley Tricycle of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania sells premade "book tricycles" as mobile libraries for \$3,200-3,500 USD. Pedal Positive of Englewood, Colorado sells "bicycle bookmobiles." These are only a few of the options for purchasing pre-designed bikes. North Vancouver's bookbike is also outfitted with an electric motor, to help riders ascend the steep hills in the area (Prest, 2018). The cost of an average electric bike can range from \$3,500-\$5,000 CAD (Griffin, 2019), which should be factored into budget requests for a Libricycle. Libraries can also hire local bike shops to either build custom trailers or outfit existing parts to become the Libricycle.

Many Syrian refugees arrive in Canada speaking little or no English (Houle, 2019). Libraries with the Libricycle, we hope, will reach out to the community to find Arabic speakers—including refugees—to hire and train as Libricycle riders. This would engender more trust between the library and its community.

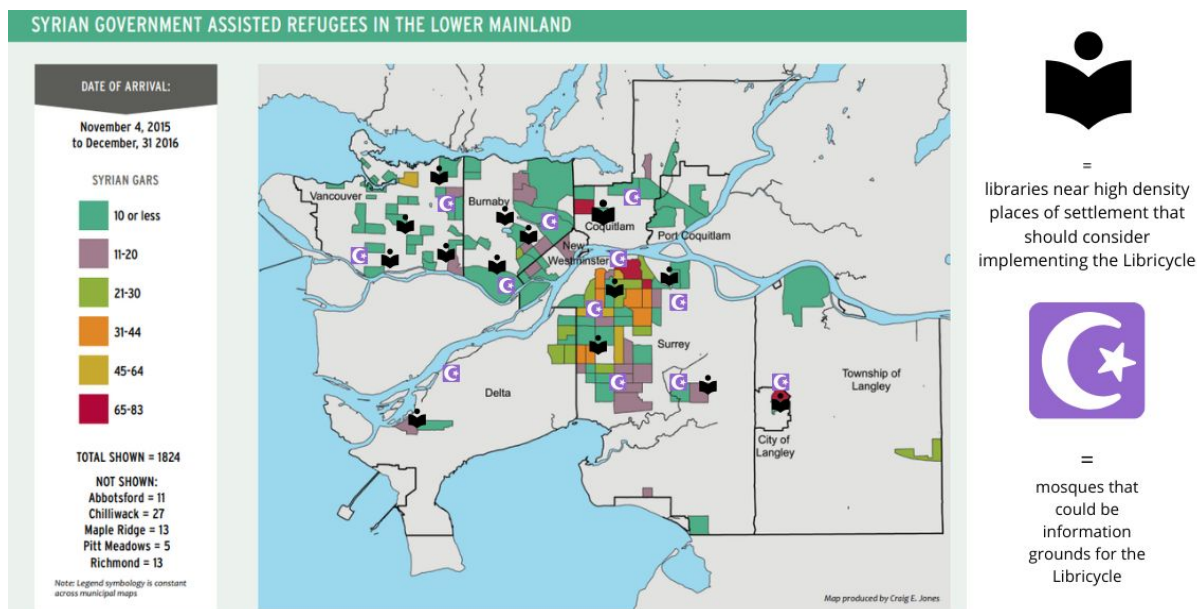
Settlement Areas and Information Grounds

The original version of the map below, released by ISSBC, shows where they settled refugees in the area in 2015-2016. We used this map to find libraries that would be ideal to serve this population with a Libricycle; nearby library branches are indicated on the map.

The other symbol on our map indicates mosques in the same area as libraries. As places of worship, mosques are likely information grounds. Knowing that a large percentage of Syrian refugees are Muslim (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2015),

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we plotted nearby mosques on the map as potential places for a library's Libricycle to visit.



Original map from Immigrant Services Society of British Columbia, 2017. Edited using Canva.

As partnerships between Libricycles and communities grow, more and different information grounds will become apparent to libraries. They might be different houses of worship, farmers' markets, or grocery stores. We urge libraries using the Libricycle model to let the connections grow organically and with permission and interest from the communities they seek to serve.

Collections and Programs

While traditional bookbikes often include information about public events in the library and community, none that we discovered was geared toward a specific population like refugees. We envision the Libricycle as carrying a community-led collection. This can start with the library bringing its standard outreach materials, such as event sheets, location information, and library card registration materials. The Libricycle will also carry settlement information, culled from libraries' existing LibGuides

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and webpages for refugees, and from settlement organizations. We also recommend that the Libricycle carry childrens' books and facilitate storytimes in appropriate languages, such as Arabic. Part of the suggested budget for libraries includes books for giveaways, like children's books and cookbooks.

Having a community-led bike means centering the materials the community wants. As a Libricycle rider builds relationships in the community, they are building the expectation that the community can request certain materials, and request that the bike come to certain events or locations. We recommend that Libricycle staff follow the community-led collections development and service planning models outlined in the Working Together Project's Community-Led Libraries Toolkit. The Libricycle model includes plans to utilize storytimes for children, but from there, services and service ideas can be facilitated from the community. Libricycle staff can act as partners and collaborators, but should engage the community in the planning and delivery of other services (2008, p. 30). These are just a few ideas from WTP's toolkit and we encourage those using the Libricycle model to examine it closely.

While the Libricycle will carry settlement materials and is initially geared toward Syrian refugees, it is intended for a more expansive definition of "refugee" that is not dependent on a particular bureaucratic classification. The bike is meant to be an invitation for dialogue and adaptation, to allow for feedback from the community about what they need, both materially and culturally. Our design is fluid, flexible, and meant to evolve as it meets different communities.

Conclusion

The Libricycle comes from the idea that a library should be a welcoming, safe place for refugees. Often fleeing violence and arriving into a new country with physical and emotional trauma (which is sometimes imposed by the new country of residence), refugees in Canada have unique information needs that defy traditional service models. Using a community-led framework and adapting already successful programs like

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bookbikes, the Libricycle is in a position to bridge gaps between the community and the library by bringing the library resources away from bureaucratic buildings and into local neighborhoods. With flexibility and a willingness to listen, the Libricycle is a service that can be implemented in Vancouver and the Lower Mainland to meet refugee information needs.

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