Introduction

To test the feasibility of using English My Way in a library setting, Good Things Foundation led a research pilot between January and March 2017, with five libraries in areas of highest ESOL need. The resulting Community ESOL in Libraries Handbook outlines common challenges, and provides tips and resources for delivering pre-entry ESOL in libraries.

As part of the research pilot, the participating libraries received access to the following:

- Training webinars with Online Centres successfully delivering English My Way.
- Good Things Foundation’s Community ESOL Handbook and Phase 2 Key Findings Report to introduce them to the programme, and Learning Circles packs (an English My Way supporting resource developed by BBC Learning English) to use to support learners.
- A day’s training from an ESOL consultant.

Each library also took part in a telephone interview with a Good Thing’s Foundation researcher, and wrote a short report about delivery of the pilot in their library.

Leeds Libraries is an Adult Learning Provider made up of 34 branch libraries. Leeds Libraries previously delivered ESOL, including non-accredited conversational English and English for beginners. This stopped due to changing priorities for the library service, but there were a number of organisations delivering ESOL in the area that they could signpost learners to.

The demographics and needs of groups in need of ESOL support in Leeds vary greatly, and there has been a recent influx of refugees.

The pilot allowed senior library staff to discuss English My Way and their role in supporting ESOL learners in Leeds. Staff felt they could do more to promote their existing resources to ESOL learners, including promoting to schools through the Schools Library Service and their regular programme of primary school visits.

Leeds Libraries is now planning English My Way delivery with a Romanian women’s group. Charlotte Self from Leeds Libraries said: “We like the range of different topics and that you have the option to cherry pick which topics to use after the first few compulsory topics.”

Derbyshire Libraries offer one-to-one computer help in all their 45 libraries and previously hosted ESOL students from a local college, although this stopped due to the campus moving further away from the library and library personnel changes.

Derbyshire has large Italian and Polish communities, and has recently seen the arrival of Syrian refugees who use library IT services to communicate with home.

The pilot saw Derbyshire Libraries revisit a partnership with a local college which provides learning for children in care, including post-16 students with ESOL needs.

Janet Scott, Senior Librarian and Community Learning and Information Service Manager said: “I used the English My Way resources to talk to new and existing partners about how we may work together. The resources are potentially a valuable addition to their existing resources, particularly as they are free.”

In the future, they hope to work with an Online Centre to deliver English My Way using branch libraries as venues.
**Blackburn and Darwen Library and Information Service** comprises 5 libraries - 2 local and 3 volunteer led. The service delivers basic digital skills training, with many people coming in for their ‘IT Skills For Jobs’ drop-in sessions requiring basic English support. Staff reductions mean their capacity for one-to-one support has reduced.

They haven’t previously delivered ESOL, instead signposting to other areas within the council, e.g. Sustainable Neighbourhoods who then introduce groups to the library, and sign them up to the Life In Britain citizenship resource.

They provide books in Hindi, Gujarati and Polish. A third of the population in Blackburn and Darwin are from an ethnic minority but the libraries don’t have the capacity to hold tutor-led sessions.

The pilot has led to library staff discovering what other assistance is available for non-English speakers in the local area. Blackburn Library has re-established a partnership with a council team who will use a room in the library to deliver ESOL supported by the English My Way resources.

Isabel Ormerod, Learning Inclusion and Development Manager said: “English My Way reassured us. Having resources which are ready made cuts down staff time and offers more scope to use not only staff but volunteers to deliver classes, making the prospect of hosting sessions more manageable.”

**Redbridge Libraries** is managed by local charity and social enterprise Vision, and comprises 12 libraries and one mobile service.

They work in partnership with Work Redbridge and Redbridge Institute of Adult Education, and between them they started ESOL learning run from libraries. For the last seven years, the library has also been running the Library’s New Readers Reading Group, for people with basic and low level English skills, run by volunteer tutors without ESOL qualifications, using the Reading Agency’s Reading Ahead materials.

In 2016, 560 library users requested English language support - 95% of whom were Muslim women.

The pilot saw Redbridge Libraries use volunteers to trial combining the Learning Circles with Reading Ahead, to support members of an existing ESOL group to become leaders of the Learning Circles themselves. They also used the English My Way resources to train existing volunteer tutors in the library’s New Readers Reading Group.

Rose Meredith, Adult Learning and Skills Development Librarian told us: “The extensive resources follow a logical plan and comprehensively manage learning classes. New ideas have been generated about the possibilities of using the resource in different ways and with different groups.”

**Kensington and Chelsea Libraries** deliver IT basic drop-ins and structured learning including ESOL and English conversation classes, reading groups and regular ESOL groups at different libraries throughout the week.

Other education providers in the area also use the library space to deliver ESOL. They have a Bengali outreach worker to engage with communities in need, and use volunteers for many different things including ESOL.

Before the pilot they largely used their own resources like guided reader worksheets, and they also participated in Reading Ahead. They hadn’t tried an IT based approach to English learning before.

During the pilot, a group of 15 learners used English My Way at one library in Central London. The library promoted the resource to their existing partner organisations and volunteers who were pleased the resources were accessible and free to use. Learners were excited about the videos - that they were around real life scenarios like asking for directions and phoning for an ambulance. Some participants used English My Way resources on their phones.

The groups who have been involved in the pilot have been very impressed with English My Way and are continuing to use it.

Mahbuba Khan, Community Outreach Officer said: “I would continue to refer and signpost learners and volunteers to the English My Way website. It’s a fantastic, quality resource which benefits both the teacher and the learners.”