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The Network Newsletter: tackling social exclusion in libraries, museums, archives and galleries

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The Network's Website is at www.seapn.org.uk and includes information on courses, good practice, specific socially excluded groups, as well as the newsletter archive.

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Did you see ...?

NB magazine

The latest issue of the RNIB magazine¹ includes a number of interesting and useful items, including the free online article, “When silence isn’t golden – what’s happening to train and station announcements?”²

It also includes “A day in the life of ... Pat Beech, Manager, RNIB National Library Service”.³

Adults Learning

Sometimes, you receive an issue of a magazine, that’s full of interesting material, and the November issue⁴ of *Adults Learning* is just that!

It includes:

- Carol Taylor “Learning – it’s a family affair”, which looks forward to the ways in which family learning might develop in the 21st century [p7]⁵
- Mary Stuart “Imagining a different life”, which, referring to the Milburn report on Fair Access to the Professions⁶, looks at what we need to do to start to have an impact on the growing inequality in the UK (thinking differently about families, peers and communities) [pp8, 10-11]
- Fran Abrams “Learning to fail”, which looks at the key role that mentoring can play in the lives of young people from working-class backgrounds [pp12-14]⁷
- Paul Stanistreet “Mind to mind, heart to heart”, looking at the Scottish tradition of oral storytelling [pp20-25]
- Miranda McKearney “Reading for Life”, looking at the role of reader development, and, with better, sustained funding, the increased role that public libraries could play [pp26-28]

¹ *NB* magazine, 47. *NB* is monthly, and there is further information about subs, etc at: http://www.rnib.org.uk/professionals/healthsocialcare/eyecareprofessionals/nbmagazine/Pages/nb_magazine.aspx#H2Heading1.

² Available to download as a Word document (52 Kb) from: http://www.rnib.org.uk/professionals/Documents/NB_Talking_point.doc.

³ Thanks to Derek Kinrade for alerting me to this.

⁴ *Adults Learning* 21 (3) November 2009. Further information from <http://www.niace.org.uk/publications/adults-learning>.

⁵ Available to download as a pdf from: <http://www.niace.org.uk/sites/default/files/documents/publications/AL-commentary-Nov09.pdf>.

⁶ The Panel on Fair Access to the Professions. *Unleashing aspiration: the final report of the Panel on Fair Access to the Professions*. The Panel on Fair Access to the Professions, 2009. Available to download as a pdf (614 Kb) from: <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/227102/fair-access.pdf>

⁷ Available to download as a pdf (224.58 Kb) from: <http://www.niace.org.uk/sites/default/files/documents/publications/ALNov09-sample-article.pdf>.

- Nicola Aylward “They just don’t get it”, a brief look at the education needs of young carers [p29].
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Tackling social exclusion – Other Agencies

Informing communities ...

This important report⁸ has just been published in the US:

“The Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Communities in a Democracy is a group of 17 media, policy and community leaders. Its purpose is to assess the information needs of communities, and recommend measures to help Americans better meet those needs ...

... The Commission seeks to start a national discussion – leading to real action. Its aims are to maximize the availability and flow of credible local information; to enhance access and capacity to use the new tools of knowledge and exchange; and to encourage people to engage with information and each other within their geographic communities.”⁹

The Commission believes that:

“The digital age is creating an information and communications renaissance. But it is not serving all Americans and their local communities equally. It is not yet serving democracy fully. How we react, individually and collectively, to this democratic shortfall will affect the quality of our lives and the very nature of our communities.” [p xi]

In order to ensure that there are “informed communities” who can participate full in US society, the Commission has urged the pursuit of the following objectives:

- “Maximize the availability of relevant and credible *information* to all Americans and their communities;
- Strengthen the *capacity* of individuals to engage with information; and
- Promote individual *engagement* with information and the public life of the community.” [p xi – emphasizes theirs]

The report argues that the US has enormous information needs, but that these are being met unequally (and looks at the uneven spread of media; the crisis facing print media; the issues around access to broadband).

⁸ *Informing communities: sustaining democracy in the digital age – the report of the Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Communities in a Democracy*. The Aspen Institute, 2009 (ISBN-10: 0-89843-511-0). Available to download as a pdf (1350 Kb) from:
<https://secure.nmmstream.net/anon.newmediamill/aspen/kcfinalenglishbookweb.pdf>.

⁹ Taken from: <http://www.report.knightcomm.org/>.

Without being “informed communities”, US society is in danger, the report argues, of becoming “unhealthy”:

“Information is as vital to the healthy functioning of communities as clean air, safe streets, good schools, and public health.” [p xiii]

“A community is a healthy democratic community—it is an ‘informed community’—when:

- People have convenient access to both civic and life-enhancing information, without regard to income or social status.
- Journalism is abundant in many forms and accessible through many convenient platforms.
- Government is open and transparent.
- People have affordable high-speed Internet service wherever and whenever they want and need it.
- Digital and media literacy are widely taught in schools, public libraries and other community centers.
- Technological and civic expertise is shared across the generations.
- Local media—including print, broadcast, and online media—reflect the issues, events, experiences and ideas of the entire community.
- People have a deep understanding of the role of free speech and free press rights in maintaining a democratic community.
- Citizens are active in acquiring and sharing knowledge both within and across social networks.
- People can assess and track changes in the information health of their communities.” [p xiv]

In order to achieve these goals, the report makes 15 recommendations. Probably the most significant for us are:

Recommendation 2: Increase support for public service media aimed at meeting community information needs.

Recommendation 3: Increase the role of higher education, community and nonprofit institutions as hubs of journalistic activity and other information-sharing for local communities.

Recommendation 4: Require government at all levels to operate transparently, facilitate easy and low-cost access to public records, and make civic and social data available in standardized formats that support the productive public use of such data.

Recommendation 5: Develop systematic quality measures of community information ecologies, and study how they affect social outcomes.

Recommendation 6: Integrate digital and media literacy as critical elements for education at all levels through collaboration among federal, state, and local education officials.

Recommendation 7: Fund and support public libraries and other community institutions as centers of digital and media training, especially for adults.

Recommendation 10: Support the activities of information providers to reach local audiences with quality content through all appropriate media, such as mobile phones, radio, public access cable, and new platforms.

Recommendation 12: Engage young people in developing the digital information and communication capacities of local communities.

Recommendation 13: Empower all citizens to participate actively in community self-governance, including local “community summits” to address community affairs and pursue common goals.

Recommendation 14: Emphasize community information flow in the design and enhancement of a local community’s public spaces.

Recommendation 15: Ensure that every local community has at least one high-quality online hub.

This is a US report, but its analysis and recommendations are entirely relevant to our situation in the UK. Highly recommended.¹⁰

Broader issues – Libraries, Museums, Archives and Cultural and Heritage Organisations

What makes a good library service?

CILIP launched these guidelines¹¹ at the Public Library Authorities Conference in October.

Arguing that “Good libraries change lives & help transform communities”, they briefly outline why “investment is crucial”; emphasise the statutory duty to provide public libraries; look at key resources/provision issues, including location and accessibility, materials and resources, staffing and activities;

¹⁰ Source: email to lis-pub-libs from Gareth Osler (<http://libraryweb.info/>).

¹¹ *What makes a good library service? Guidelines on public library provision in England for portfolio holders in local Councils*. CILIP, 2009. Available to download as a pdf (93 Kb) from: http://www.cilip.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/C7D62BE7-0512-4D20-87BD-3138C4E6AE11/0/What_makes_a_good_library_service_CILIP_guidelines.pdf.

stress that service planning and continuous improvement are essential; and finish with 10 questions for portfolio-holders to ask to find out.

What I particularly like is the up-front linking of a “good library service” with delivering key policy objectives by providing:

- “A positive future for children and young people
- A fulfilling life for older people
- Strong, safe and sustainable communities
- Promotion of local identity and community pride
- Learning, skills, and workforce development
- Health improvements and wellbeing
- Equality, community cohesion and social justice
- Economic regeneration” [p2]

Let’s hope that portfolio-holders take up these issues and pursue them.

Broader issues – Government, Government Agencies and Local Government

Report of the Inquiry into the Governance and Leadership of the Public Library Service in England

The APPG report¹² was published in September, and also launched at the Public Library Authorities conference in October.

The APPG considered six key areas:

1. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the present system for the governance and leadership of the public library service in England?
2. Should local communities have a greater say in decisions about the public library service?
3. Should central government do more to superintend the public library service?
4. Are local authorities the best agency to provide public library services?
5. What are the governance and leadership roles of the Advisory Council on Libraries (ACL), the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) and the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS)?
6. What changes (if any) are required to improve and strengthen governance and leadership?

¹² All-Party Parliamentary Group on Libraries, Literacy and Information Management. *Report of the Inquiry into the Governance and Leadership of the Public Library Service in England*. APPG, 2009. Available to download (1270 Kb) from the CILIP website: http://www.cilip.org.uk/cgi-bin/MsmGo.exe?grab_id=31&page_id=16057600&query=appg&hiword=appg+.

Having considered written submissions and the outcomes of 'evidence sessions', the APPG then came up with fourteen recommendations, summarised as:

1. "Government funding and functional responsibility for public libraries should be brought together within a single government department ...
2. Powers of intervention should be retained by the Secretary of State and be underpinned by clear guidance on the current definition of 'a comprehensive and efficient service' ...
3. The application of the Public Libraries Act 1964 should be clarified by a clear definition of the minimum level of service (or core service) to be expected by customers ...
4. Local authorities should continue to carry responsibility and accountability for the provision of public library services in their area ...
5. The core public library service should continue to be free at the point of delivery ...
6. The purpose, role, composition and business programme of the Advisory Council for Libraries should be reviewed and clearly articulated via appropriate dissemination and promotion including an annual report and website ...
7. A Library Development Agency for England (LDAE) should be established, inter alia to:
 - advocate for public libraries
 - articulate a national vision
 - establish marketing, awareness and promotional programmes
 - disseminate good practice
 - establish a comprehensive evidence base
 - facilitate quality improvements ...
8. In the light of the above, the role, function and funding of the MLA should be adjusted accordingly
9. Local authorities should publish a code of customer engagement giving a clear methodology for informing, consulting and involving their users and non-users in the planning of service provision ...
10. The use of volunteers should be positively encouraged to form part of the customer offer but not as a substitute for core service provision ...
11. Local authorities should publish a code of practice in relation to the use of volunteers which should include practical support arrangements regarding hours, training, expenses, meals arrangements and police checks etc ...

12. Local authorities should be encouraged to further develop collaborative arrangements with particular emphasis on the provision of back office services ...
13. The MLA (or LDAE) should commission a mid-term communications strategy for the public library service and programme its implementation accordingly ...
14. The MLA (or LDAE) should develop and actively promote training schemes for library personnel to improve management, leadership and corporate governance skills ..." [pp9-10]

The Group has covered extremely important ground, and came to some clear conclusions – it is to be hoped that these get taken on board when the DCMS Modernisation Review is finally published.

Abbreviations and acronyms

CILIP = Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals

DCMS = Department for Culture, Media and Sport

RNIB = Royal National Institute of Blind People

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