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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 ...?

Off the Record

This is the e-magazine of the Archives & Records Association Section for New Professionals, and the latest issue¹ has some interesting articles, including:

- Kasia McCabe “My journey with Others”, a brief description of one placement via the “Opening up Archives” programme (which mentions some of the work on migration that is undertaken at the Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester & Rutland [pp10-12])
- Anna Crutchley “Equality and Diversity in the Archives workplace: recent developments in Archives Sector Training” [pp13-15]

CILIP Update

The February 2013 issue has a number of articles about qualifications, including a very interesting one², “What to study?”, which “talks to UK professors about academic library and information education and what to consider when you choose a course”. What does come across very strongly from this article particularly is how ‘technical’ skills and knowledge have moved up the agenda, and how there seems to be little focus on working with users and non-users of services – or on social justice.

Museums Journal

The February 2013 issue includes a short piece³, “Combining tourism and social justice”, which argues the case for museums doing both, rather than assuming they are an ‘either/or’.

Health & Wellbeing issues – Libraries, Museums, Archives and Cultural and Heritage Organisations

First incomplete field guide to wellbeing in libraries

This series of case studies^{4, 5} puts the case strongly for the role that public libraries play to support the health and wellbeing of the people of Wales.

¹ *Off the Record*, 5, Winter 2013. Available to download as a pdf (2890 kb) from: <http://www.archives.org.uk/images/documents/SNfP/otr5.pdf>.

² Elspeth Hyams “What to study?”, *CILIP Update*, February 2013, pp23-25.

³ Jo Jones “Combining tourism and social justice”, *Museums Journal* February 2013, p19.

⁴ *First incomplete field guide to wellbeing in libraries*. Lles Cymru Wellbeing Wales, 2013. Available to download as a pdf (3120 kb) from: http://librarywales.org/fileadmin/documents/toolkit/Marketing/Get_Libraries/Wellbeing_in_Libraries_ENGLISH_FINAL.pdf.

⁵ Source: Public Library News, 24 Jan 2013.

It begins by putting the role of libraries and wellbeing into context by showing how they already contribute (eg “Providing reading and literacy opportunities to improve the health literacy of the nation” [p7]) and lists some of the key benefits of libraries.

It then looks at some approaches to health and wellbeing, such as: Book Prescription Wales, story times, work with Macmillan Cancer Support, job clubs, and health promotion. These are followed by authority-by-authority examples of work being undertaken, for example:

- Bridgend – Improving your Skills
- Caerphilly – “Wicked” (information literacy)
- Cardiff – Breakfast Club for homeless and other vulnerable people
- Cardiff – “Memories” (weekly reading sessions with patients suffering from dementia)
- Conwy – Talking without Words (using Boardmaker software)
- Monmouthshire/Glamorgan/South Wales-wide – CLOCH project, “CLOCH is a partnership project, led by Glamorgan Archives, bringing together libraries, archives and museums across South Wales to offer placements and work experience in the heritage sector. The project will recruit 16 trainees over three years to gain skills and accredited learning in the heritage sector.” [p37]
- Newport – “Book Break”, a programme supporting foster carers
- Rhondda Cynon Taf – The Talking Reading Group for blind and partially sighted people
- Swansea – regular Tea Dances (with local history and reminiscence activities)
- Wrexham – Carers’ Collection.

There’s lots of information, good practice and ideas in here – highly recommended.

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

Launch of the universal offers

The Society of Chief Librarians, together with Arts Council England and The Reading Agency, have launched this paper⁶ to announce the initiative, “Libraries of the 21st Century”⁷.

The paper sets out “the four main ‘21st century’ services” [p2] – these are:

- The Universal Health Offer
- The Universal Reading Offer

⁶ *Launch of the universal offers*. Society of Chief Librarians, 2013. Available to download as a pdf (113 kb) from: <http://www.goscl.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Launch-of-the-Universal-Offers-Media-Pack.pdf>.

⁷ See: <http://www.goscl.com/libraries-of-the-21st-century-scl-launches-four-national-offers-for-public-libraries/>.

- The Universal Information Offer
- The Universal Digital Offer.

The Universal Health Offer “will see services to promote and enhance the health and wellbeing of local communities being rolled out in every public library in England and Wales” [p3]; these services will include:

- “A network of local hubs offering non-clinical community space
- Community outreach supporting vulnerable people
- Expert staff with local knowledge
- Assisted on-line access
- Self-help library resources
- Health and care information services
- Referral and signposting
- Public health promotion activity
- Social and recreational reading opportunities like reading groups
- Volunteering and community engagement activities.” [p3]

It also launches “Reading Well”, a “new ‘Books on Prescription’ scheme” [p3] which builds on The Reading Agency’s “Mood Boosting Books” promotion⁸. This promotion has proved very successful in practice, and deserves wider recognition.

As some critics have said, however, the paper does make it sound as though this work is completely new, and rather overlooks the excellent “Books on Prescription” services already offered across the UK.

The Universal Reading Offer:

“... sets out what public libraries will offer in order to provide a modern reading service in their local communities. It builds on public demand for a lively and engaging reading offer with reading groups, challenges, promotions and author events, alongside public engagement opportunities services for specific audiences such as families and the blind and partially sighted ...” [p5]

The Universal Reading Offer services are:

- “Free books and reading resources
- Free community space
- Supported online access
- Community outreach
- Services for targeted audiences
- Access to local and family history resources
- Multimedia reading resources.” [p5]

In addition, the paper also highlights some developments in National Reading Programmes, including:

⁸ See: <http://readingagency.org.uk/adults/mood-boosting-books/> and <http://readinggroups.org/moodboosting/>.

- “The creation of a new package of year round volunteering opportunities for 11-19 year olds, to build their life skills and confidence at the same time as supporting others to enjoy reading and join the library.
- A new digital skills sharing programme funded by Arts Council England
...
- A partnership with the 2013 Rugby League World Cup, which will support libraries’ adult literacy Six Book Challenge to encourage new audiences to engage with reading.” [p6]

The Universal Information Offer aims:

“... to develop the role of public libraries in helping citizens access information online in a digital age.

The focus of this offer is on supporting people accessing information and services online in life-critical areas such as careers and job seeking; health; personal financial information and benefits. Central to this offer is helping people to use vital government online information and services.” [p7]

It also highlights another new development, “helping claimants of the new Universal Credit” [p7].

Finally, the Universal Digital Offer “defines the minimum that a public library authority should provide and that customers should expect from their public library. It helps support the delivery of all the Universal Offers.” [p8]

“Every public library service will provide:

- Free access to the Internet for every customer (for a minimum period of time)
- Clear and accessible online information about library services
- Staff trained to help customers access digital information
- Ability for customers to join online
- Ability to be contacted online/via email for answers to customer enquiries
- 24/7 access to services through a virtual library presence
- Ability to reserve & renew items remotely via an online catalogue.” [p8]

“The Universal Digital Offer also sets out what every library authority should aspire to provide.

These services include:

- Opportunity for e-lending of digital books, audio and video with remote access
- Social networking interaction/engagement opportunities
- A library APP to allow full access to all library digital services from mobile devices

- Digital services that work with a range of assistive technology such as speech programmes or magnifiers.
- Free internet access for all wanting to use it, including WiFi
- Tailored digital information for each customer
- Training in digital information literacy and access for its customers and staff both locally and remotely
- Time-relevant, quality checked digital content for the communities it serves and support for communities to create their own content
- Loan of digital devices for those without other access
- Access to digitised local archive and local history resources
- Federated searching of locally held online resources
- Access to online learning opportunities (citizenship & theory driving tests or language learning etc.)” [pp8-9]

There has been a mass of media coverage, both nationally and also within the ‘library world’, generally giving this initiative a mixed reception⁹. From the perspective of promoting social justice, this paper has much to commend it (although, in hindsight, there may be some issues around its linking quite so clearly to the new Universal Credit). The four Offers are exactly what public libraries should offer – and, indeed, many have been offering for some considerable time.

What it also does very neatly is bring together some of the answers to the perennial question “What are public libraries for?” Everyone has a view on the role of libraries, and this paper attempts to focus attention on some key activities.

It may, as some critics are suggesting, be rather late in the day, and it does ignore the plight of so many public libraries and library staff across England and Wales, but it does, at last, create some structure onto which libraries can start to build.

This Newsletter was compiled by John Vincent, and all items are written by him, unless otherwise stated. Please send any comments or items for the next issue to:

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⁹ For example, see: *Public Libraries News*, <http://www.publiclibrariesnews.com/2013/01/special-report-libraries-of-the-21st-century-versus-offering-a-new-dress-to-a-plague-victim.html>.

Also *The Independent* Literary Editor, Boyd Tonkin, seems to have taken against Books on Prescription – see: <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/news/boyd-tonkin-books-as-a-tranquiliser-8475946.html>.