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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 ...?

Adults Learning

The Spring 2013 issue¹ includes a number of useful articles, eg:

- Paul Stanistreet “It’s about getting people to talk to each other”, looking at the role of adult education in improving community relations in Northern Ireland [pp14-19]
- Alice Robson “Time to change: a participatory approach to inclusion”, reporting on a learning project with Hackney’s Roma community [pp25-27]
- Melanea Warwick “Only connect”, a brief report on participation in the arts by people with profound and multiple learning difficulties [pp44-47]

CILIP Update

The June issue² included two interesting articles (even if I do say so myself!):

- Karen McPherson “My Library: giving young people a voice”, which outlines Essex Libraries’ online consultation with young people [p48]
- Helen Brazier and John Vincent “Making the Six Steps promise a reality” [p42] [also see note at the end of the Newsletter]

Youth Library Review

The latest issue³ includes a number of articles on health:

- Agnès Guyon “Healthy Reading: East Lothian for Children, Young People and Families”, which describes “the first book prescription scheme for children and young people in Scotland” [p3]⁴
- Deb Holden “Well Read collections for young people in Cumbria Libraries” [p4]
- Elizabeth Schlenker “The rude health of Healthybooks”, which introduces the website that lists “books for use with children facing a variety of physical, emotional or behavioural problems” [p14]⁵

¹ *Adults Learning*, 24 (3), Spring 2013. Further information available at: <http://www.niace.org.uk/publications/adults-learning>.

² *CILIP Update*, June 2013. Available to CILIP members via the archive, <http://www.cilip.org.uk/publications/update-magazine/update-digital/pages/digital.aspx>.

³ *Youth Library Review*, 43, 2013. Further information about YLR at: <http://www.cilip.org.uk/get-involved/special-interest-groups/youth/publications/review/pages/default.aspx>.

⁴ There is more information about this, including a link to the *Healthy Reading Guide* at: http://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/info/200261/children_and_young_people/491/young_people_services/4.

⁵ See: <http://www.healthybooks.org.uk/>.

Tackling social exclusion – Libraries, Museums, Archives and Cultural and Heritage Organisations

A report on public library services for newcomers to Canada

This new report⁶ forms part of a practicum placement with the Saskatoon Public Library, April 2013, and aims:

“... to engage in [an] exchange of ideas by providing a survey of newcomer services offered by a selection of Canadian public libraries and to make specific recommendations for [Saskatoon Public Library] to consider implementing in its newcomer service plans.” [p2]

It investigates three key areas of work:

- English Language Learning Assistance (including conversation practice; tutoring; writing workshops; reading/book clubs; language learning collections and resources)
- Settlement Assistance (eg citizenship services; community awareness and integration; classes and workshops; promoting the library to newcomers)
- Cultural Recognition and Celebration (collections; events).

The report then goes on to highlight challenges, many of which are exactly the same as those faced in the UK, including:

- Limitations on staffing numbers and space
- Collection limitations
- Accessibility.

Finally, the report looks at future plans which could grapple with some of the challenges (and also suggests areas for further research). Plans include:

- Building partnerships
- Investigating changing demographics
- Increasing outreach efforts
- Offering more English language support.

This is a really useful introduction to work in Canada that parallels that here. Recommended.⁷

⁶ Jannaya Jensen. *A report on public library services for newcomers to Canada: compiled by Jannaya Friggstad-Jensen (Dalhousie MLIS Candidate 2014) as a component of a practicum placement with Saskatoon Public Library, April 11th to 30th, 2013.* Available to download as a pdf (104.22 kb) from: http://myweb.dal.ca/jn503574/spl_report.pdf.

⁷ Many thanks to Jannaya Jensen for allowing us to cite this report, and for obtaining permission from participants for us to access it.

Developing community-led public libraries ...

Continuing with a part-Canadian theme, published in February, this new title⁸ from Ashgate looks at how community-led libraries have developed in the UK and in Canada since the publication of *Open to all?* in 2000.

We need to start with a declaration of interest, in that John Vincent was involved in this book (in commenting on and checking the text as it developed) and he also contributed a brief case study.

Just as a quick reminder, *Open to all?* was the result of an 18-month research project which looked at public library policy and social exclusion. It produced a final report with eight case studies of different types of library authority; a survey of UK public library authorities; and a series of working papers that reviewed aspects of social exclusion⁹.

This work was one of the inspirations for the Working Together Project in Canada, which ran from 2004-2008.¹⁰

This book takes the learning from these two pieces of work, and applies it to nine critical areas:

- Consultation
- Needs assessment and research
- Library image and identity
- Outreach, community development and partnerships
- ICT and social exclusion
- Materials provision
- Staffing, recruitment, training and education
- Mainstreaming and resourcing for social exclusion
- Standards and monitoring of services.

Each of these nine chapters follows broadly the same format:

- *Open to all?* recommendations
- An overview of UK public library policy and practice in relation to social exclusion from 2000-2012
- Findings from the Working Together Project

⁸ John Pateman and Ken Williment. *Developing community-led public libraries: evidence from the UK and Canada*. Ashgate, 2013. Further information at: <http://www.ashgate.com/isbn/9781409442066> and at: https://www.ashgate.com/pdf/tis/9781409442066_ROW.pdf. An extract is available at: <https://www.ashgate.com/pdf/SamplePages/Developing-Community-Led-Public-Libraries-Intro.pdf>.

⁹ Dave Muddiman *et al.* *Open to all? The public library and social exclusion. Volume 1: Overview and conclusions*. Resource, 2000. Available to download from: http://www.seapn.org.uk/content_files/files/ota_volume_1_final_version_sept_211.doc.

¹⁰ For background, see: http://www.librariesincommunities.ca/?page_id=8. A major output from this Project is: *Community-led libraries toolkit*. Working Together Project, 2008. Available to download as a pdf (1060 kb) from: http://www.librariesincommunities.ca/resources/Community-Led_Libraries_Toolkit.pdf.

- The development of a community-led service philosophy in public libraries in Vancouver, Regina, Halifax and Toronto between 2004 and 2008.
- Each chapter also has some “Helpful Hints”, practical tips for ways of taking this work forwards.

The final two chapters provide a synthesis of the findings from this work in order to give “a blueprint and road map for developing needs-based and community-led public library services.” [p22]

At a time when many public libraries in the UK are under threat¹¹ and there is also something of a move away from community-based and community-led services (unless it is to give over parts of the service to the community to run entirely), this powerful book is a strong reminder of the importance of community-based work and of the role that libraries can play, and asks us to rethink the way we work. As just one example, in the chapter on ICT and social exclusion, it stresses:

“... it is important to view ICT as a means to develop relationships which can extend the breadth of library services in the community beyond technology.” [p118]

Reminding ourselves of the importance of focusing on community needs (rather than assuming that most people are online and ‘connected’ – or want to be) is emphasised too in the “Helpful Hints” for that chapter, eg:

“#2: Libraries should draw up ICT plans which include a strategy outlining how the needs of socially excluded communities are prioritized. ICT should be used as a means to tackle social exclusion rather than as an end in itself ...

#4: ICT initiatives should be targeted more closely at excluded groups and communities in a proactive way. Appropriate levels of skilled staffing and support should be offered to users.” [p121]

Highly recommended.

Museums change lives

Launched on 1 July, this document¹² is the Museum Association’s vision for the impact of museums.

¹¹ See, for example: Steve Davies. *The public library service under attack: how cuts are putting individuals and communities at risk and damaging local businesses and economies*. UNISON, 2013. Available to download as a pdf (1900 kb) from: <https://www.unison.org.uk/upload/sharepoint/On%20line%20Catalogue/21589.pdf>.

¹² *Museums change lives: the MA’s vision for the impact of museums*. Museums Association, 2013. Available to download as a pdf (2170 kb) from: <http://www.museumsassociation.org/download?id=1001738>.

It is accompanied by an introductory blog-piece¹³ from Maurice Davies, and a web-based resource-bank¹⁴ (which includes case studies, links to other MA articles, and reading lists).

It follows on from a series of initiatives, particularly since the 1990s, around increasing access, participation and learning, and specifically following the “Museums 2020” consultation that ran over the last couple of years. The vision:

“... aims to enthuse people in museums to increase their impact, encourage funders to support museums in becoming more relevant to their audiences and communities, and show organisations the potential partnerships they could have with museums, to change people’s lives.”
[p3]

It argues from the start that:

“All museums, however they are funded and whatever their subject matter, can support positive social change. Some museums already pay great attention to this; others have as yet untapped potential.

The time is right for museums to transform their contribution to contemporary life. As public expenditure continues to be cut, it is more important than ever to have a strong sense of social purpose. Funders and policy makers expect museums to achieve greater social outcomes and impact. Individuals and communities are under stress and every museum must play its part in improving lives, creating better places and helping to advance society, building on the traditional role of preserving collections and connecting audiences with them.” [p3]

It also declares its principles from the start:

- “Every museum is different, but all can find ways of maximising their social impact.
- Everyone has the right to meaningful participation in the life and work of museums.
- Audiences are creators as well as consumers of knowledge; their insights and expertise enrich and transform the museum experience for others.
- Active public participation changes museums for the better.
- Museums foster questioning, debate and critical thinking.
- Good museums offer excellent experiences that meet public needs.
- Effective museums engage with contemporary issues.
- Social justice is at the heart of the impact of museums.
- Museums are not neutral spaces.
- Museums are rooted in places and contribute to local distinctiveness.”
[p4]

It goes on to look briefly at what museums can offer (with examples) to:

¹³ Maurice Davies “Is your museum changing lives?”, 1 July 2013, <http://www.museumsassociation.org/maurice-davies-blog/01072013-maurice-museums-change-lives>.

¹⁴ See: <http://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-change-lives/web-resource>.

- Enhance wellbeing
- Create better places
- Inspire people and ideas.

It then reiterates the vision, including:

“Now it is time for museums to raise their ambitions. The Museums Association believes that every museum should commit to improving its impact on society. Every museum can play a part, however small, in improving health and wellbeing, helping to create better places and championing a fairer and more just society. Every museum should have the ambition to change people’s lives.

Transforming a museum to improve its impact sustainably will need a strong sense of purpose, clear organisational values and steadfast commitment from all levels of the organisation. It means moving on from a general sense that the museum provides public benefit to identifying precisely how it will best make a defined and explicit contribution: to decide what it is going to do to support positive social change. Above all, this is about an attitude of mind: a clear commitment to address the needs of individuals, communities, society and the environment.” [p12]

Finally, it lists ten simple actions that everyone can take to help their museums to improve their social impact.

Putting social impact at the core of museums’ work is a highly timely reminder of both their importance (and potential impact) and the need to raise our profile in this current economic climate.

This is a really strong vision statement, accompanied by ideas and resources for practical action, and is highly recommended (and it would be wonderful if other sector bodies developed a vision equally as powerful!).

Highly recommended.

Tackling social exclusion – Government, Government Agencies and Local Government

Youth social exclusion and lessons from youth work: evidence from literature and surveys

This new document¹⁵ from the European Commission:

¹⁵ Giulia Paolini *et al.* *Youth social exclusion and lessons from youth work: evidence from literature and surveys*. Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, European Commission, 2013. Available to download as a pdf (997.98 kb) from: http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/youth/tools/documents/social_exclusion_and_youth_work.pdf.

“... aims at offering evidence about the situation of social exclusion suffered by young people in the European Union, and the positive effects that youth work initiatives produce in fostering their (re)inclusion. Looking at factual information on the main conditions of exclusion is essential to have an accurate understanding of the threats encountered by young people. Available data and research literature illustrate the major reasons behind the marginalisation of young Europeans, and pave the way to the development of effective policy strategies to prevent it.” [p4]

To do so, the paper has also developed a new, working-definition of social exclusion which:

“... can be summarised as follows, although the list is not exhaustive:

- experiencing poor living conditions (in terms of housing, nutrition, clothing, physical safety);
- being unable to participate in the social and political life of one’s community (not out of choice but as a result of obstacles encountered);
- being unable to enjoy cultural and recreational activities (as a result of obstacles encountered);
- suffering from health conditions deriving from poor living standards and experiencing obstacles to accessing health care and social services when needed;
- suffering from an emotional and psychological sense of exclusion and isolation from the community and/or from society at large (worsening wellbeing ...)” [p6]

This is a valuable revised definition for us to use to highlight the effectiveness of the cultural sector’s work in combatting exclusion.¹⁶

An evaluation of Getting on Together: the community cohesion strategy for Wales

The Welsh Government has just published this external evaluation¹⁷ of their community cohesion work.

“*Getting on Together*, the community cohesion strategy for Wales, was launched in December 2009. It provides an understanding of community cohesion that is distinct and different to the agenda in England, in that it recognises the potential for deprivation and social exclusion to undermine community cohesion.” [p1]

¹⁶ Source: Clinks *Members Policy Briefing*, June 2013.

¹⁷ David Robinson *et al.* *An evaluation of Getting on Together: the community cohesion strategy for Wales*. Welsh Government (Social Research 49/2012), 2013. Available to download as a pdf (811.61 kb) from: <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/caecd/research/130429-evaluation-getting-together-community-cohesion-strategy-wales-en.pdf>.

The evaluation has looked at how successful the Strategy has been in terms of one of its key aims, local delivery:

“A series of factors were identified as critical to effective local delivery. In particular, progress was most evident in areas with a dedicated community cohesion officer, a community cohesion action plan or strategy, and where systematic attempts had been made to map local needs and identify priority issues. Real progress mainstreaming community cohesion had been made by many local authorities. However, staff in certain policy areas remained uncertain about the relevance of community cohesion to their work or how they might contribute to efforts to promote cohesion locally.” [p3]

The evaluation looked at ten case studies, the achievements of which can be summarised as:

- “*responsive local services* - promoting greater understanding and responsiveness among local service providers to the priorities of the community cohesion agenda
- *promoting understanding* - increasing understanding between different groups, such as new arrivals and settled populations, or between young and old people
- *integration support* - advice and assistance for newcomers, including language training, in a bid to help them better understand and live in their new town, access key services and seek work
- *managing tensions* - mediating between different groups and resolving emerging conflicts” [p3 – italics theirs]

This evaluation points to some good practice ideas which we might like to incorporate in our own work to develop cohesive communities.¹⁸

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

The library of the future ...

Since the beginning of 2012, Arts Council England has been working on a major research project, “Envisioning the library of the future”. The results have been published on the ACE website¹⁹, and ACE has now also published their response, *The library of the future*²⁰.

¹⁸ Source: NFER *On The Web*, May 2013.

¹⁹ See: <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/what-we-do/supporting-libraries/library-of-the-future/>.

²⁰ Alan Davey. *The library of the future: a response to Envisioning the library of the future by Arts Council Chief Executive Alan Davey*. Arts Council England, 2013. Available to download as a pdf (1900 kb) from: http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/media/uploads/pdf/The_library_of_the_future_May_2013.pdf.

We ought to begin this with a declaration of interest: John Vincent contributed a 'think-piece' to the ACE blog right at the beginning of this research, and he also contributed to the SW regional workshop and commented on later stages of the work.

The overall message from the research was:

- “There is a clear, compelling and continuing need for a publicly funded library service.
- We heard this from people at every stage of our research. It didn't matter whether they use libraries or not, people are vocal and passionate about their value.
- Public libraries are trusted spaces, free to enter and open to all. In them people can explore and share reading, information, knowledge and culture.” [p3]

In addition, the research identified that:

“Three essential ingredients define the public library:

- a safe, creative community space that is enjoyable and easy to use, in both physical and virtual form
- an excellent range of quality books, digital resources and other content
- well-trained, friendly people to help users to find what they want either independently or with support” [p3]

The report also identified the key roles that public libraries play – they:

- “develop basic skills and habits of modern literacy and learning with the help of books and digital resources
- support business and economic growth by information and skills development
- help us understand ourselves, our place in the world, and the heritage of the communities in which we live
- encourage us to explore our own culture and creativity, and that of others around us
- improve our health and well-being by helping us to make sense of what is happening to us and how we can shape our lives
- build a healthy democracy by providing free access to reliable information through which we form our opinions” [p4]

Personally, I think it would have been good if an even stronger social justice role had been highlighted here, but at least there references to literacy, health, heritage of communities, and opinion-forming information.

The major part of the report identifies the four priorities “to sustain and develop a 21st century public library service”. [p5]

These are:

1. “Place the library as the hub of a community

2. Make the most of digital technology and creative media
3. Ensure that libraries are resilient and sustainable
4. Deliver the right skills for those who work for libraries.” [p5]

For each of these, the report sketches in some suggestions of how they might develop – for example:

Place the library as the hub of a community

- “re-think the way library spaces are used to encourage shared and creative activity while continuing to welcome those who want to explore on their own
- integrate the library’s physical and virtual spaces
- sustain enough spaces offered by libraries to meet the needs of their communities” [p6]

Make the most of digital technology and creative media

- “improve the quality and consistency of the virtual library experience
- develop an open ICT infrastructure that encourages innovation and better service
- enable libraries to lend the full range of e-books, including remotely” [p7]

Ensure that libraries are resilient and sustainable

- “create a positive environment for communities and individuals to become actively involved in the design and delivery of their library services
- encourage the development of new approaches to governing and managing libraries that make it more likely that they will survive and succeed
- equip libraries to be commissioned to deliver other public services, and to commission other organisations to deliver library services” [p8]

Deliver the right skills for those who work for libraries

- “ensure those responsible for libraries have the right range of skills and experience to lead their services successfully
- encourage those working in libraries to offer creative and innovative ways to use library spaces, books and other resources
- ensure that library staff have the skills to develop and respond to digital developments and to support digital users” [p9]

So far so good – although critics of the report have emphasised how little of this is new. However, it’s probably useful to bring it all together into the four priorities

(although they too are very thin on social justice), but, of course, the real point will be to see what comes out of all of this in terms of real action.

The final statement, “The library of the future” [p11], does include some very positive messages, for example:

“Those working in libraries will be less occupied in straightforward transactions and more involved in linking people and organisations together in using library spaces and resources for new activities. There will be a greater emphasis given to community, digital and entrepreneurial skills. In this context, volunteers offer new ways to add capacity and skills.

Libraries’ role out in the community, reaching vulnerable and excluded people, will extend to popping up temporarily as local circumstances demand and allow. This might involve using vacant spaces, or being invited in to other community services or workplaces to meet particular needs.”

But how are we going to get there? And how do we get the resources? And buy-in from every library authority and its staff?

It seems likely, from the reported discussion²¹ with Brian Ashley (the new Arts Council lead for public libraries), that, in the short term at least, public library standards are not going to be reintroduced, and library services will continue to receive spending cuts.

Unless these questions are answered and there is a real way forward identified, there is a strong likelihood that this report will merely be acknowledged and then shelved.

To emphasise the point, the impact of what has happened to date is highlighted in the report²² from UNISON (also cited above), for example:

“In addition to the decline in the number of libraries and mobile libraries, there was a reduction in library staff numbers, in the number of library visits by the public, the number of ‘active borrowers’, the overall number of books issued, the number of web visits, the number of terminals with library catalogue and internet access and the number of electronic workstations available to users per 10,000 population ...” [p3]

A timely article by Steve Richards also puts all this in perspective; he says:

“There is a dangerous fantasy taking hold in England.

Since the announcement of last week’s spending review, I have heard or read many times that we can get much better public services for a lot less money ...

²¹ Ian Anstice. “Libraries Director Brian Ashley tells it how it is to the Library Campaign”, *Public Libraries News*, 30 June 2013, see: <http://www.publiclibrariesnews.com/>.

²² Steve Davies. *The public library service under attack: how cuts are putting individuals and communities at risk and damaging local businesses and economies*. UNISON, 2013.

... as Roy Jenkins once observed, we expect Scandinavian-style public services and US levels of taxation and spending. The current danger is that this is not only an expectation. There is now an assumption that both are possible.

In every publicly funded institution there is waste. Much can be done to get more 'bang for our bucks' as Oliver Letwin likes to put it. But even if savings are made, there will be other demands. Listen to Boris Johnson putting forward the case for more spending in London, where puny levels of expenditure lead to some of the highest fares in the world. Note the third world-style potholes on the roads. Consider another obvious point: our ageing population will need more NHS provision and social care. Contemplate the global economy and wonder how we can make the most of new, growing markets, without the best training and education available.

I am sorry to make the unwelcome assertion, but these all cost money. If it is not found, the services will decline, and we will return to the third world squalor that foreign tourists noted and, to some extent, still do.”²³

The Six Steps courses

One of the methods for making the Six Steps promise become a reality is by organising a series of training courses. These are being supported by RNIB, Share The Vision, the Society of Chief Librarians, CDEG, and, in Scotland, the Scottish Library and Information Council.

Here is the list of courses, in alphabetic order of region/country:

East Midlands region

Tues 5 November 2013, Mansfield Library

East of England region

Mon 9 September 2013, RNIB Peterborough

London

Thurs 31 October 2013, RNIB Judd Street

North East region

Weds 13 November 2013, Newcastle City Library

North West region

Weds 9 October 2013, Lancaster Library

²³ Steve Richards “HS2 must not fail. If it does, investment in our future is doomed”, *The Independent*, 4 July 2013, “Independent Voices” column, p17, see: <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/hs2-must-not-fail-if-it-does-investment-in-our-future-is-doomed-8685619.html?origin=internalSearch>.

Scotland

Weds 26 February 2014, Edinburgh Business Centre
and:
Weds 26 March 2014, Edinburgh Business Centre

South East region

Weds 25 September 2013, Portsmouth Library

South West region

Weds 20 November 2013, Taunton Library

Wales

Tues 1 October 2013, Cardiff Central Library

West Midlands region

Mon 14 October 2013, Solihull Central Library

Yorkshire region

Weds 4 September 2013, Wakefield Library

Northern Ireland

Early 2014 – details to be confirmed.

Further information from john@nadder.org.uk.

Abbreviations and acronyms

DWP = Department for Work and Pension
CDEG = CILIP's Community, Diversity & Equality Group
CILIP = Chartered Institute for Library and Information Professionals
MA = Museums Association
RNIB = Royal National Institute for Blind People

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