

# Public libraries and social justice – examples of impact

## Existing research that shows impact

The 2002 report on *Impact evaluation ...* (Wavell *et al.* 2002) drew together existing research to show that libraries had a positive impact on:

- “Personal development – including formal education, lifelong learning and training; after-school activities; literacy, leisure, social, and cultural objectives through book borrowing; skills development, availability of public information;
- Social cohesion – by providing a meeting place and centre of community development; raising the profile and confidence of marginalised groups;
- Community empowerment – by supporting community groups and developing a sense of equity and access;
- Local culture and identity – by providing community identity and information;
- Health and well-being – by contributing to the quality of life and how well people feel, as well as providing health information services;
- Local economy – by providing business information and supporting skills development.” (Wavell *et al.* 2002: v)

The **Ipsos MORI research into digital inclusion** and the impact of UK Online Centres (Ipsos MORI 2008) – many of which are sited in public libraries – highlights the role that libraries can play, eg Cambridgeshire’s EngAGE, through which “courses were aimed at local residents aged 50 plus with little or no experience of using computers and the internet.” (Ipsos MORI 2008: 20-21)

## New/ongoing research that shows impact

The **City of London’s Festival survey** (City of London 2011) shows that:

“The City’s libraries were not only the most widely used service among people responding to the survey, but also the highest rated over all.” (City of London 2011: 10)

Also:

“A total of 149 people stated that they agreed with the statement: ‘The City Libraries’ services and activities contribute to the enjoyment and achievement of children and young people’. This figure represents 96% of all people who answered the question, and 79% of the total respondents to the survey.” (City of London 2011: 13)

In 2010, **Hertfordshire Libraries** consulted over proposed changes to opening hours, and received a wealth of feedback (Hertfordshire Libraries Culture and Learning 2010), reprinted as Appendix 2 (with kind permission of Hertfordshire CC).

## **Work with children & families**

“In 2009, **Croydon Libraries** introduced Baby Rhymetime sessions on Saturdays. Previously these took place only on weekdays. Baby Rhymetimes are half hour sessions where parents sing and say nursery rhymes with their babies and very young children. The sessions are led by library staff and may include using musical instruments, puppets etc ...

Parents and carers were asked to complete a simple questionnaire ... using the Museums Libraries and Archives Council's *Inspiring Learning for All* evaluation tool ...

Twelve libraries took part in the evaluation. A total of 151 questionnaires were completed. The outcomes recorded indicate the parents' or carers' perceptions of the impact of the Rhymetimes on the babies and/ or their own enjoyment, progression etc.

98% of respondents showed evidence of enjoyment  
83% of respondents showed evidence of progression  
93% of respondents showed evidence of acquiring new skills  
72% of respondents showed evidence of a change in knowledge  
and understanding  
52% showed evidence of a change in attitudes and values.”<sup>1</sup>  
(Croydon Libraries 2009: 1-2)

## **Home Library Service**

“A survey of **Hertfordshire Home Library Service** (HLS) customers is carried out once every three years to inform the annual return to Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) and to be used for benchmarking.

The information requested by CIPFA is a percentage satisfaction 'rating' from customers regarding the **materials** supplied to them by the HLS. In Hertfordshire we also use the opportunity provided by the survey to collect qualitative feedback from customers about the HLS service in general.

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<sup>1</sup> I have the complete summary report and statistics if required (and also copies of the other documents cited).

Staff and volunteers providing HLS from static libraries collected information from **161** customers between Monday 7 November and Friday 16 December 2011; this represents a **30.2% response rate** based on the figure of 533 HLS customers reported by libraries at March 31 2011.

The table and chart below show the satisfaction ratings from the 2011 survey compared to the surveys carried out in 2005 and 2008.

<b>What do you think about the choice of books or audio books you receive? survey year</b>	<b>very good</b>	<b>good</b>	<b>adequate</b>	<b>poor</b>	<b>very poor</b>
<b>2005</b>	69.0%	23.2%	5.6%	1.4%	0.8%
<b>2008</b>	70.5%	24.5%	4.1%	0.8%	0.2%
<b>2011</b>	75.3%	21.0%	3.1%	0.6%	0.0%

**What do you think about the choice of books or audio books you receive?** Percentage of respondents answering 'very good' or 'good':

2005            92.2%  
 2008            95.0%  
 2011            96.3%”

(Hertfordshire Libraries Culture and Learning 2011: 1)

## **Work with new arrivals**

“Many library services are accepting the challenge to meet the needs of new communities by adapting their offer. Cumbria library service has been cited by the Audit Commission as an example of good practice for its work in addressing the needs of Eastern European migrant workers. It has provided extra internet services, expanded the collection of foreign books and promoted learning about Eastern European culture within the local community in order to increase inter-cultural understanding ...

Active engagement leads not only to improved services and increased participation levels, but also to positive community outcomes around cohesion and empowerment. Getting involved in local services through volunteering initiatives such as Camden’s Refugee Work Experience Placement Programme, undertaken as part of Welcome to Your Library can have multiple benefits for the service and the participants. The project aimed to increase library usage by refugee communities and equip the volunteers with skills which would help them to gain employment.” (Ngyou 2009: 1)

**Welcome To Your Library** was a national project connecting public libraries with refugees and asylum seekers, funded by Paul Hamlyn Foundation, and co-ordinated through the then London Libraries Development Agency:

“WTYL contributed highly relevant learning to public library service planning and delivery and provides good practice examples in relation to:

- Mapping need
- Developing project management skills
- Reaching refugee communities
- Building effective and sustainable partnerships
- Enhancing access
- Providing a range of effective projects that support community cohesion
- Enhancing non-project staff awareness of relevant issues.” (ADP Consultancy 2007: vii)

The learning from WTYL was disseminated widely via a Good Practice Guide (Vincent and Carpenter 2007).

## **Skilled for Health**

The MLA London *Skilled for Health* Grants Programme in 2009:

“... gave London library services the opportunity to develop partnerships with a range of local agencies including adult education colleges, health providers and community groups in order to engage learners with Skills for Life needs. 15 London library services took part, running informal *Skilled for Health* courses in health awareness with embedded literacy, language and numeracy support.” (Wolfe 2009: 3)

“The 15 participating library services were successful in engaging learners with a variety of different needs, including those from disadvantaged and hard to reach communities.

Learners engaged include:

- Young parents with ESOL needs or low literacy levels
- Learners from areas of high deprivation
- Homeless service users
- Learners from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, refugees and asylum-seekers
- Hospital staff working in low paid jobs
- Vulnerable older people
- People with learning disabilities.” (Wolfe 2009: 3)

## **Literacy/Basic Skills**

### **The Reading Agency's Six Book Challenge<sup>2</sup>**

"Launched by independent charity The Reading Agency in 2008, the annual Six Book Challenge invites less confident readers and those with poor literacy or language skills to pick six reads and record their reading in a diary in order to receive incentives and ultimately a certificate.

Research (Oakey 2007) shows that reading for pleasure, supported by libraries, motivates people to continue reading and learning while at the same time improving their literacy skills. An impact evaluation (Grylls 2008) in the first year of the Challenge found that 94% of respondents felt a sense of achievement, 88% said they gained from the experience and 60% reported an improvement in their skills – a finding endorsed each year by tutors.

18,000 people registered for the Six Book Challenge in 2011 (a third up on the previous year) - over half through public libraries working in partnership with local adult education, colleges, workplaces and local community groups for visually impaired people, people with learning difficulties and those with mental health issues. Partnership work of this kind can be very labour intensive for library staff and yet it yields enormous benefits in terms of people's self-esteem, self-determination and skills development.

The Reading Agency runs the Six Book Challenge to help tackle the country's continuing skills deficit. New Government figures show that 15% (5.1 million) of the working age population in England are still at or below the literacy level expected of an 11 year old (Department for Business Innovation & Skills 2011)."

## **Community libraries**

Following the injection of funding from the Big Lottery, there has been a major development of libraries with community engagement at their core. A good example is Great Yarmouth Community Library (Norfolk) which has been guided by a community steering group – their latest report includes, for example, the following aim:

"By September 2011, 350 sub level 2 learners will improve their literacy, numeracy and IT literacy skills by engaging in learning activities at the library delivered by the library and partner agencies." (Holden 2012: 3)

The report notes that this outcome has been achieved, and highlights include:

- A YMCA Tenancy Awareness Course

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<sup>2</sup> See: [www.sixbookchallenge.org.uk](http://www.sixbookchallenge.org.uk).

- Children’s Gardening workshops run by Norfolk Library and Information Service and Norfolk Wildlife Trust.

## **CILIP Libraries Change Lives Award**

“The Award highlights and rewards good practice in any innovative library and information projects which:

- Change lives
- Bring people together
- Involve user communities
- Demonstrate innovation and creativity
- Develop staff and services.”

Examples of outstanding work can be seen on the CILIP website<sup>3</sup>, and there is a list of examples attached as Appendix 1.

## **Working across local authorities**

Libraries work closely with colleagues in other Council departments.

As examples, **City of London Libraries** have collected evidence of the impact they have been having on colleagues’ work:

“The City’s libraries provide a range of services that support the fundamental aim of the Community and Children’s Services department, which is to improve outcomes for children and their families. Both the Barbican Children’s Library and the Shoe Lane library run regular activities such as Book start, rhyme time, toy library, Homework clubs, stay and play and the summer reading challenge. These activities support our work by preparing children for school, encouraging and enabling children to read, and by reaching families who live in the north of the City where we have no other physical means of contact. We are working in close partnership with the libraries team to deliver pilot sessions aimed at fathers/male carers, and the new Read to Succeed initiative will add a much valued layer of support to those children who need additional support with reading.”

And:

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<sup>3</sup> See: <http://www.cilip.org.uk/about-us/medalsandawards/libraries-change-lives/pages/finalists2011.aspx>; <http://www.cilip.org.uk/about-us/medalsandawards/libraries-change-lives/pages/lclafinalist10.aspx>; and <http://www.cilip.org.uk/about-us/medalsandawards/libraries-change-lives/pages/lclawins.aspx>.

“The Adult Skills & Community Learning service has built up a strong partnership with the City’s Culture, Heritage & Libraries service over recent years, and the relationship is mutually beneficial. The City Guides course supports and promotes the City’s heritage, through its training of City of London Guides, and makes extensive use of the resources available through the CHL service as part of this training. Following from their training, the qualified City Guides offer to guide visitors within the City at special heritage events (the Open House weekend, the Lord Mayor’s Show) and also work through the City’s Tourist Centre offering a menu of guided walks. There are several courses that provide progression through to the City Guides course, and which are also closely connected to the CHL service. These include the very popular ‘Mysteries of London: Researching London’s Past’, which has been developed with the LMA and the Museum and uses the LMA and the Guildhall library to introduce students to the original archives and documents available through the library service so that they can understand and develop their own historical narratives about the City’s past. We support the Guildhall Library’s new ‘Tracing Your Family History’ course, helping to market and enrol students for this course. We also run an innovative Art in the Gallery course, which enables students to develop their painting skills within the Guildhall Art Gallery, inspired by the City’s permanent collection.

Beyond the Arts and Humanities curriculum, the Adult Skills service has worked very well with Libraries in developing its provision for residents and service users who speak English as a second language. These ESOL classes take place at the Barbican Library and at Shoe Lane Library, and help reach and engage learners who we may not otherwise be able to reach. Students from ESOL classes at the library go on to take nationally recognised qualifications in English, and are able to better make use of the Libraries resources. Finally, to support these, and other classes, we also run regular, free, Information, Advice and Guidance slots at the Library to help people who want to get into education, employment or training.”

With grateful thanks to all those colleagues who shared examples of evidence of impact and good practice,

John Vincent  
The Network – tackling social exclusion ...

February 2012

### A sample of CILIP Libraries Change Lives Award winners and finalists

- *Adults with learning difficulties*: Making the Difference, Kent Libraries and Archives – winner 2011; It's My Life, Enfield Libraries and Enfield Disability Action – finalist 2005; Bradford/Care Trust Libraries Partnership Project – winner 2008
- *Black and minority ethnic communities*: The Northamptonshire Black History Project, Northamptonshire Racial Equality Council (lead agency) and Northamptonshire Library and Information Service (community partner) – winner 2005; Multicultural Development Service, Lincolnshire County Council Library Service – finalist 2006
- *Children with Autistic Spectrum Disorders*: Across the Board: Autism support for families, Leeds Library and Information Service – winner 2009
- *Community engagement via IT*: Nunny TV, North East Lincolnshire Library Service – finalist 2008
- *Health/bibliotherapy*: Read Yourself Well, East Ayrshire Library, Registration and Information Services – finalist 2007
- *Looked-after children & young people*: Caring about Reading, Leicestershire County Library Services – finalist 2003; The Edinburgh Reading Champion Project, City of Edinburgh Council – finalist 2009
- *Refugees and asylum-seekers*: Welcome To Your Library , Camden Libraries, Leicester Libraries, working with London Libraries Development Agency – winner 2007
- *Travellers*: The Mobile Library Travellers Project, Essex County Council Libraries – winner 2004
- *Visually impaired people*: eye2eye: the visually impaired IT project, Portsmouth City Libraries – winner 2003; Large (Leeds Always Reading Group for Everyone), Leeds School Library Service – finalist 2007; NEALIS (North East Accessible Library and Information Services) – finalist 2011
- *Young people – excluded and vulnerable children and teenagers*: Sighthill Library Youth Work, Edinburgh City Libraries and Information Service – winner 2006; and Books on the Edge, Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council – finalist 2006.



## ***Feedback received during the 2010 consultation on library open hours – why libraries are important***

During the seven week consultation on proposed changes to Hertfordshire libraries open hours and mobile library service carried out in 2010 between 26 October and 11 December many respondents gave specific examples of why libraries are important.

### **Main themes and example comments**

#### **Contribution to education/study:**

- Education for all is crucially important and libraries assist in this respect.
- The library is the most accessible education for all people.
- The Library provides a vital venue for students from our local schools to do their homework when no suitable facilities are available for them at home.
- I believe it is essential that the libraries remain open at all times possible, education with a small e is the only way forward for our society.
- As an author I realise the vital role played by the library service in creating and maintaining an educated and informed population.
- The public libraries have always been the basis of higher education for those unable to go to University.
- Public libraries also fulfil a vital function in Lifelong Learning for older people, giving them the opportunity to pursue an interest or continue studying a subject outside formal education.
- Libraries play an important part in the education of the young; these are the future of the country.
- Unless schools are going to lend out books to children how will we encourage them to participate/take up reading as a society that requires more educated workers?

#### **Communities:**

- These libraries are one of the fundamental requirements needed to support the people and community.
- The library promotes intellect and a sense of community; this is something we should keep.
- They perform an important service to the community and help educate the future generation.
- The library is the hub of the community always busy. It's a great centre for learning.
- The services provided by the Library are, in my view, critical to the education, social and mental welfare of the community.

- The library is an essential part of the community. As well as providing books and educational resources, it is also a source of valuable information about the community and local area.
- The library is, and should remain, a great resource for all sections of the community.
- I think the library is a huge part of the community. Everybody needs the library!

**Providing access to IT and the internet:**

- There is no other public internet access in the town.
- Use of the internet is so much appreciated by people away from home.
- Provides internet access to those who have no other ways to access the web.
- Not everybody has access to computers and the internet.
- The visibility of people learning in libraries has motivated reluctant learners to take first their steps to develop IT skills.
- Computers are also there to be used by those of us that do not have access to one at home. It's amazing the number of school children that use them for their homework.
- Libraries are a vital source for those without access to IT at home.
- As an over 60's user. I find the library invaluable. One of the major advantages is being able to use the computer for 1 hour everyday free!
- Don't forget the many overseas people currently living in the town for whom internet access in their lodgings is not possible.

**Providing vital/valuable resources:**

- They are an essential resource for the community and their value is grossly underestimated.
- This library is a vital facility/service in the community. There is no other similar service available locally.
- A library is not a luxury it is essential.
- Libraries should be seen as treasured resources and be used more.
- With all the cuts to everything else i.e. Citizens advice bureau, libraries are going to be even more vital many people.
- This is vital resource for learning, particularly for children and should be available to access for as many hours possible.
- This is a vital service which is very needed for us to understand how to plan the future learning from the past and for this good records & knowledgeable staff is essential.
- Library is an essential service and especially in these trying times we should not chip back on services which at least give some relief.
- The library is an essential community resource and should be treated as such.

### **A place to socialise**

- It's a community library, we need the social contact.
- For some mums Rhyme time might be their only chance to meet other mums.
- Our library is more than a place to borrow books it is a social meeting place for many people. I know of one elderly couple that met in the library and later married.
- This library keeps us in touch with friends in the community and family and friends overseas via the computers. I am always here.
- The library is a meeting place for all ages who are given advice and help.
- I meet friends in the library.
- We come here for the company as well as books etc. We need to have social time in pleasant surroundings.
- I hope this service is not affected as I use it to keep in contact with my local community. I use the internet to keep in touch with my family who live abroad. I would be lost without this wonderful service. I visit the library 5 days a week as a means of keeping in touch with the world and it keeps me going.

### **Job seeking and employment:**

- Coming to the library has kept me sane during a period of no work. I can't explain how much use it has been to me in my work to find a job.
- Those who use job centres also use libraries for research, online applications sending email.
- I use this library to find jobs, CV applications.
- Think of the amount of unemployed people we have who need daily access to computers, the internet & printing - every day. Libraries have an important role to play in times of recession.
- With so many people having to change jobs this library is the place in the community for essential unconditional support and encouragement.
- There are many unemployed people who rely on the public computers to look for jobs and apply for jobs online.
- When I lost my job I relied on the facility of the library as I didn't have computer at home. It also gave me support seeing the helpful faces everyday. Now I have a job I still use the facilities as they are invaluable. If the times you propose had been in place at that time I would not have had as much help or support because it would not have been open!

### **Helping people on a low income:**

- When people are losing their jobs and the economy is poor they can't afford books and newspapers and it is even more important that library services are available to plug the gap.
- This library is used by so many people for so many reasons; it is a meeting place for people that can not afford other activities.

- It is so much more vital to have a Library that is available to those who don't have the opportunity to buy their own PC, or can not afford to buy their own books and magazines.
- Libraries are a wonderful resource and give lots of benefits. Especially to those who do not have access to a home pace or can not afford to buy books.
- Please retain this vital service it will be even more important as people become poorer and a sizeable number of people lose their jobs.
- Public library services were established as one of the earliest forms of the 'welfare state' with the intention of providing educational aspiration amongst the poorest members of our society. It still provides a public service to those at all levels of society.
- Rhyme time is a fantastic initiative for both toddlers and parents. It is fun and safe environment. There are likely to be many mums whom rely on this as it is free and they may not be able to afford other paying classes if on a low income.

#### **Inclusion:**

- There are very few pleasures available to EVERYONE and library resources are essential to any civilised society.
- It is the only safe, neutral, free space in the area and of course provides opportunities for recreation and learning for all.
- It is essential for everyone, all ages and ethnic groups, to have this library facility.
- The library provides a vast number of resources that can be accessed by anyone.
- The library is here to cater for everyone from any background.
- The library is a community hub and enables everyone to have access to learning and information regardless of their circumstances.
- There are so few resources in the area that offer all ages such an educational and important service.
- The library is always busy and caters for all people of all ages.

#### **Literacy:**

- This library provides an outstanding service to the community promoting literacy through their various activities.
- The library provides a vital service and I think we should be encouraging children to embrace reading and literacy an as many ways as possible.
- Libraries form an essential part of the community and are instrumental in helping children read and write.
- As a father with a 9 year old who loves reading and writing visiting the library is a valuable resource.
- My daughter is 3 and thanks to the Bookstart scheme and activities organised by the children's librarian is really comfortable in the library and absolutely loves books.

- Reading is a habit you develop from very early on. Please think about the impact on education now; boys do not read enough as it is.
- The library is an essential community asset providing lending and reference books. It supports improving literacy.

**Important to the town/area:**

- The library is not only well supported each day by those in the town, but many people attend by bus from local villages - this in turn supports our local shops.
- Heart of the town!!
- The library is a great asset and resource which helps to keep the town thriving.
- The library is a vital focus of the town providing information on a variety of topics.
- This small library is an essential part of our village society.
- The library is the only tourist or other information centre for the town.
- A much needed thing is the town - a centre of excellence, always helpful.
- It is the only amenity of which we can truly be proud.

**Important to the economy/society:**

- Maintain the service so that it can assist the rest of the community through this recession.
- If libraries are proven to raise the standard level of education and people are able to find better, more well paid work; how much do libraries contribute financially to Hertfordshire?
- A good resource - one that plays a part in driving the economy of the area.
- In time of economic downturn it is even more important that the resources are fully open to all both in terms of assisting students to realise their academics potential and for adults re-aligning their skills and new market requirements. Both must play vital role in helping the economy to revitalise itself in a global context.
- The library service is very valuable to the community and particularly in times of recession it is even more important!
- Libraries are needed most when times are difficult.
- It is key for any society to be able to read and further themselves for free and when they need to.

**Providing warm, safe places:**

- The library is a place anyone can come to check emails read the paper meet friends and relax in a safe warm environment.
- I am homeless, local libraries are a haven to be able to spend the day in. They are welcoming, safe and warm. Cutting the hours will leave me with little choice of places to go, specially now winter is coming.
- During the day it's a warm, safe place where people can read the newspapers, browse etc especially the elderly and low income.

- Somewhere warm and friendly for people to use the computers and magazines/ books.
- Libraries provide a warm indoor space for the lonely and elderly whose other services are being axed.
- We do not have a lot of money, or transport is not always readily available. To spend our free time in the warmth and security of this place has been highly rewarding for my children as they all excel at reading and writing, which has been a direct result of the usage of this place.

### **Providing free services**

- In these austere times, activities that are either free or cost little will become more important to everyone.
- There aren't many activities for babies/toddlers where you can just drop in for free.
- Friday morning rhyme time is one of the most popular free events in town.
- With an aging population and cuts in many areas the library with free books, internet and reference is very important.
- Unemployed on JSA use the free internet at the local libraries to search for work.
- We are very grateful to the library service for all the Harry Potter books on CD. We can't afford to buy these but have borrowed them many times. We order them free of charge and they usually arrive within days.
- A local library is the heart of its surrounding community, enabling those in difficult circumstances to job hunt for free in local press and on the internet, educate themselves and socialise.

### **Contribution to health and well-being**

- The great benefit we all get from easy access to reading information is not just a pleasure, it helps our mental state - keeps us stimulated etc. So we don't need to bother the NHS etc.
  - This library is a life line for people like me - it's helped me overcome my depression because I get to meet people here. I get my talking books. This is a day out when I come here.
  - Cannot sleep without a good read.
  - I have mental health problems and often use library during day. Sometimes just to get out of the house.
  - The services provided by the library are, in my view, critical to the education, social and mental welfare of the community.
  - I have mental health problems and when I am unwell it is often the only public place I can go to where I feel safe.
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