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.

Contents List

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Did you see …?

Museums Journal

The Dec 2017 issue[1] includes:

- Caroline Parry "Museums told to review policies relating to sexual harassment", which looks at the urgent need to review policies following recent allegations of harassment [p7]
- Sarah Hartshorne "Sexism in the sector needs to be challenged" ("Comment" column) [p14]
- Rebecca Reynolds "Learning in museums", which looks at offering courses that teach English [p61].

The Jan 2018 issue[2] includes:

- Jonathan Knott "Crisis? What crisis?", which looks at the sector's response to the Mendoza Review [pp12-13, 15]
- Thanh Sinden <u>and</u> Anna Liesching "How can the sector attract more diverse audiences?" ("Comment" column) [p19]

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

Overcoming information poverty …

Based on Anthony McKeown's PhD thesis, this book[3] was published in 2016.

I need to begin this assessment by declaring an interest, in that, in 2015, I was asked by Elsevier to review the book proposal (more of that at the end of the assessment).

Based on research into provision by Libraries NI:

"The book proposes a model for understanding the concept of information poverty, develops indicators for its measurement, and provides recommendations for service improvement based on analysis of

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[1] *Museums Journal*, Dec 2017. Further information about *MJ* at: https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal.
[2] *Museums Journal*, Jan 2018. Further information at: https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal.
[3] Anthony McKeown. *Overcoming information poverty: investigating the role of public libraries in the twenty-first century*. Chandos Publishing ("Chandos Information Professional" series), 2016. Charged-for publication, further details at: https://www.elsevier.com/books/overcoming-information-poverty/mckeown/978-0-08-101110-2.

public library services at macro (strategic), meso (community) and micro (individual) levels."[4]

It begins by 'setting the context', looking at, for example, the role of public libraries in creating social inclusion; poverty in Northern Ireland; the role of DCAL; and library usage, particularly in deprived urban areas.

It then goes on to developing an understanding of information poverty, looking at the links between 'information poverty' and 'poverty'; perceptions of library staff, managers and policy-makers of information poverty; and Government policy towards tackling social exclusion.

Chapter 4 looks at some of the factors that help create information poverty. One of the most interesting and useful parts of the book appears here: the analysis and criticism of using a binary approach (eg "information rich" versus "information poor") which a number of authors – and Anthony McKeown – consider far too limiting and in danger of creating the assumption that people are therefore fixed at one of these poles. This chapter also looks at some of the barriers that libraries create to fuller use by the whole community. This is followed by a continuum developed by the author, showing the links between information poverty/information poor and information access/information richness, for example:

> No/limited/basic ICT skills → Skilled user of ICT

and a "Continuum determining information poverty or richness", which runs from "Absence of IP [Information Poverty]", via "Moderate level of IP", Severe IP" to "Extreme IP".

There is a brief look at "Measuring the impact of public library services", and then the chapter moves on to introducing "A three-level model of information poverty", which is the author's main original thinking; the three levels are: macro (strategic), meso (community) and micro (individual) levels.

The rest of the book concentrates on how to tackle information poverty at these three levels.

The final chapter is "Concluding thoughts and recommendations". The recommendations include (with greater detail in the book) that public library authorities should:

1. Develop an Information Poverty Strategy

2. Develop and implement a Community Engagement Strategy

3. Further develop the educational role of public libraries

4. Further develop the social role of public libraries

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[4] Taken from: https://www.elsevier.com/books/overcoming-information-poverty/mckeown/978-0-08-101110-2.

5. Raising awareness and marketing

6. Identifying and targeting groups: "[…] such as the disabled, minorities, lone parents, the elderly, the unemployed, those with limited qualifications/skills and young people not in education, employment or training" [p215]. Later, this section also suggests targeting "adult men" via "[…] sport, hobbies (arts, crafts, gardening), ICT skills training […]" [p215].

7. Developing services for the unemployed

8. Improving stock

9. Library staff [staff development and leadership].

The recommendations are important and very useful, although it's a pity that a more personalised approach, eg "homeless people", "older people" had not been used; and that the target groups appear to be quite limited – eg it does not include refugees or LGBT people.

There is a lot to think about in this book, and it is well worth searching out and reading. However, to conclude, I'll go back to my original comments on the book proposal:

> "[…] I'm also not convinced that the author has done enough to translate a PhD thesis into something accessible and useful in a practical way."

There could have been much more in terms of practical examples and case studies of good practice, so that the reader could go away with real ideas to plan and implement.

It's also a pity that there is quite a large number of typos (and even an instruction, presumably from the editor, about something to add in) which, whilst not overwhelmingly important, do mar a useful title.[5]

Tackling social and digital exclusion – Other Agencies

Reboot UK: social outcomes powered by digital

This new report[6] has just been published by Good Things Foundation.

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[5] Thanks to Libraries Unlimited for borrowing this title for me via inter-library-loan.

[6] *Reboot UK: social outcomes powered by digital*. Good Things Foundation, 2018. Available to download as a pdf (2920 kb) from: https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/sites/default/files/research-publications/reboot_social_outcomes_v5.pdf?utm_source=Good+Things+Foundation+News&utm_campaign=01f8162f5c-GT_Foundation_News_Feb_2018&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_e9dc7b206a-01f8162f5c-110029601.

"Reboot UK is a consortium project, funded by Big Lottery Fund, and delivered by Good Things Foundation in partnership with Family Fund, Mind and Homeless Link. The project sought to investigate the transformative powers of digital for groups of people in poverty, helping them to improve their health and wellbeing." [p3]

The report demonstrates the impact that this work has had:

"For individuals:

- Providing an introduction to learning through radically informal support
- Helping people to develop an understanding of how to stay well
- Helping people to develop goals, and changing their perceptions of the future
- Support to reintegrate into society
- Support for people to develop new skills
- Help to engage meaningfully with digital technology
- A reduction of the need for support to use technology
- Support for entry into employment
- Encouragement of frequent internet use
- Support for recovery from addiction

For communities:

- The creation of localised digital support
- Profile raising of community assets and approaches
- The development of new and novel community engagement practices
- An approach which saw the threading of digital skills through specialist support
- The creation of communities of support (driven by peer mentors)
- The expansion of digital activities based on user needs
- The use of organisation's social and professional networks to build awareness of digital technology issues

For society:

- A programme legacy of raising the profile of digital support within the homeless sector. The connector uses the social and professional connections between organisations to build an awareness of issues around digital technology. It aims to support frontline workers to think about why they should provide digital support to their clients, and how they do this." [pp4-5]

The report concludes:

"Reboot UK has had a number of positive benefits on the most vulnerable in society, working and impacts have been felt by individuals, communities, and by the wider society.

Following to the conclusion of the programme, we are now looking to the future, and for opportunities to use these findings to continue having an impact.

Reboot UK is the only national programme to provide digital skills to multiply excluded groups. The programme worked to help specialist services to understand:

- the value of providing digital support
- how to provide digital support
- who in the same community could help to support clients.

Lessons from Reboot UK can be used by a range of organisations supporting vulnerable people to use digital to improve their lives. Some of the findings from Reboot UK can be embedded into delivery, however we have found funding for local organisations meant they could ring fence funding and so could prioritise this work. We would recommend that funders think about how they can embed digital when commissioning programmes for these groups.

We have proven through this programme that digital support is fundamental for all, but particularly for the most vulnerable groups. It is not an additional skill, but a skill that supports independent living.

Good Things Foundation, together with consortium partners Homeless Link, Family Fund and Mind will continue to look for opportunities to use these findings, through embedding the lessons and approaches learnt, and through developing new programmes and partnerships." [p21]

Valuable evidence of the impact of improving digital access and skills. Recommended.[7]

Health & Wellbeing issues – Other Agencies

Literacy and life expectancy

This new report[8] from the NLT:

"[…] provides the first overview of the evidence linking literacy and life expectancy in England through the conduits of health and socioeconomic factors.

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[7] Source: *Good Things Foundation News*, Feb 2018.

[8] Lisa Gilbert, Anne Teravainen, Christina Clark and Sophia Shaw. *Literacy and life expectancy: an evidence review exploring the link between literacy and life expectancy in England through health and socioeconomic factors*. National Literacy Trust, 2018. Available to download as a pdf (1270 kb) from: https://literacytrust.org.uk/research-services/research-reports/literacy-and-life-expectancy/.

It builds on the evidence outlined a decade ago in our *Literacy Changes Lives* [9] report, where we established a relationship between literacy and life chances through the lenses of physical and mental health, economic wellbeing, family life, civic engagement and crime." [p3]

Its key findings include:

- "Literacy is linked to life expectancy through a range of socioeconomic factors. People with poor literacy skills are more likely to be unemployed, have low incomes and poor health behaviours, which in turn can be linked to lower life expectancy […].
- Literacy is linked to life expectancy through health. Those with low levels of literacy are more likely to have poor health, low health literacy and engage in harmful health behaviours, which in turn puts them at a higher risk of living a shorter life.

In addition, this research found that:

"Inequalities in literacy and life expectancy in England are intensely localised:

- Our new data analysis shows that people living in areas of England with the most serious literacy challenges are more likely to have shorter life expectancies than people living in communities with the fewest literacy challenges.

  - Our analysis compared ward level life expectancy data from the ONS and Public Health England against ward level data from our work with Experian in 2017 to pinpoint the communities in England with the most acute literacy problems. Working with Experian, we created a *literacy vulnerability* score for every parliamentary constituency and electoral ward in the country by analysing data from Experian's socio-demographic classification system, *Mosaic*, and the 2011 Census on the social factors most closely associated with low literacy: low levels of education, low income and high unemployment. [their italics]

- Our analysis also found that the link between literacy and life expectancy is stronger at the bottom end of the scale [...]

- The national gap in life expectancy between children from communities with the highest and lowest vulnerability to literacy problems in the country is staggering:

  - A boy growing up in a ward with one of the highest vulnerabilities to literacy problems in the country has a life expectancy 26.1

[9] George Dugdale <u>and</u> Christina Clark. *Literacy changes lives: an advocacy resource.* NLT, 2008. Available to download as a pdf (74.09 kb) from: https://literacytrust.org.uk/research-services/research-reports/literacy-changes-lives-2008-advocacy-resource/.

years shorter than a boy growing up in a ward with one of the lowest vulnerabilities to literacy problems.

- o A girl growing up in a ward with one of the highest vulnerabilities to literacy problems in the country has a life expectancy 20.9 years shorter than a girl growing up in a ward with one of the lowest vulnerabilities to literacy problems.

Therefore:

"A localised approach is needed to improve literacy and life expectancy in England"

- Improving local literacy levels could raise life expectancy in the most deprived wards in England by reducing inequalities in health and socioeconomic circumstances:

  - o Compared to people with poor literacy skills, those with good literacy skills are less likely to exhibit poor health behaviours, have lower incomes or live in more deprived communities – all of which are risk factors to longevity.

- Inequalities in literacy and life expectancy are related to geographic community and solutions therefore need to be tailored to meet local need and built on local assets." [pp4-5]

The report goes on to outline how the NLT has been developing localised Hubs in particular communities:

"[…] we launched our first National Literacy Trust Hub in Middlesbrough in 2013 […]

We have subsequently launched National Literacy Trust Hubs in Bradford, Peterborough and Stoke-on-Trent, as well as regional campaigns in Manchester and the North East.

Whilst we are beginning to see real improvements in the communities where we have established local campaigns, as this report highlights, it is just the tip of the iceberg. We need to redouble our efforts. As a starting point, during 2018, we have and will be launching new literacy campaigns in social mobility cold spots across the UK, starting in Swindon [[10]] and Nottingham, to mark our 25th anniversary year." [pp28-29]

Interestingly:

"The Department for Education has adopted this same place-based approach to tackling inequality and improving social mobility for its

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[10] See: "Swindon stories", https://literacytrust.org.uk/communities/swindon/?mc_cid=f650f967d4&mc_eid=a2d98ab814.

Opportunity Areas strategy [11], as have Save the Children UK for its Children's Communities programme [12] and a host of local community-led groups. These initiatives all share an analysis that inequality is related to geographical community and that solutions need to be tailored to local need and built on local assets." [p29]

This is a significant report in terms of drawing together evidence for the links between literacy levels and health – and also provides strong supporting evidence of the importance of work around literacy.[13]

Broader issues – Other Agencies

Safeguarding

Following the media coverage of Oxfam (and other charities), NCVO have produced a helpful blogpost[14] which reminds us that:

> "When putting together their safeguarding toolbox [15], charities certainly should consider criminal records checks. But remember, these are only accurate on the day they were printed, can take months to get and only tell if someone was caught. Also, it's worth remembering that not all crimes prevent someone from being a great addition to your team."

In addition:

> "When recruiting, charities can also screen applicants by asking about their past, their values and their motivations for applying. These can be tested through interviews, selection events and references. After appointing someone, a trial period is also very useful to monitor someone in action.
>
> Once recruited, charities can also risk assess roles and activities and put steps in place to protect the vulnerable. This could include effective supervision, quality checks, and asking your clients for feedback."

Despite all these precautions, abusers may still 'slip through'. Therefore, it is vital that organisations are open about their practices:

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[11] See: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-mobility-and-opportunity-areas.

[12] See: https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/what-we-do/uk-work/in-communities/childrens-communities.

[13] Source: National Literacy Trust *Monthly Newsletter*, Feb 2018.

[14] Shaun Delaney "Dealing with abuse: are criminal records checks the answer?", 14 Feb 2018, https://blogs.ncvo.org.uk/2018/02/14/dealing-with-abuse/?_cldee=am9obkBuYWRkZXIub3JnLnVr&recipientid=contact-449e2fd22746e411b4e4d89d6765e198-767d77aa16014760ac1cad2104f8cb8a&utm_source=ClickDimensions&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Small%20members%20monthly%20round%20up&esid=24f310cb-e816-e811-8134-e0071b652f51&urlid=8.

[15] See: https://knowhownonprofit.org/organisation/operations/safeguarding.

> "This is why it is crucial for charities to be transparent about safeguarding – and why working with agencies like the Charity Commission and the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) is so very important. This is also why it is important to create a culture where it's OK for staff and volunteers to raise concerns to their managers."

To provide further support to charities and other organisations, NCVO has now made available some resources that are usually for members only:

- "Safeguarding, vulnerable clients and DBS"[16]
- "Whistleblowing"[17].

These resources are primarily aimed at charities, but also provide helpful information for us.[18]

Abbreviations and acronyms

DCAL = Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Northern Ireland)
NCVO = National Council for Voluntary Organisations
NLT = National Literacy Trust
ONS = Office for National Statistics

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[16] See: https://knowhownonprofit.org/tools-resources/volunteers-and-the-law/vulnerable-clients.
[17] See: https://knowhownonprofit.org/people/hr/discipline-grievance-and-whistleblowing/whistleblowing.
[18] Source: email from NCVO, 21 Feb 2018.