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

Number 218, April 2019

(Formerly published as *Public Libraries & Social Exclusion Action Planning Network Newsletter*, issue 1, May 1999 – issue 29, September 2001)

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 April issue includes:

- Geraldine Kendall Adams "Is it time that we rethought our approach to collections?", which reports on the launch of the *Empowering collections* report[1] [pp12-13]
- Hilary Jennings "Museums can play key role in climate activism" ("Comment" column), which looks at some recent initiatives [p14]
- Amber Aleroff "We can all learn from each other", which gives an update on the "Partnerships with Purpose" project[2] [p15]
- Helen Chatterjee <u>and</u> Miranda Stearn "What are the opportunities for museums and galleries regarding social prescribing?" ("Comment" column), which introduces some of the current developments [p17]
- Alex Stevens "Diversifying the workforce" ("In practice" column), which starts with a very brief look at the latest ACE data, and then primarily focuses on a n interview with Sara Wajid (the Head of Engagement at the Museum of London). This is followed by "Attracting diverse applicants: practical steps for museums", a useful basic introduction, and a case study on Daryl Wells, "Applying for jobs as a BAME career changer" [pp58-59, 61]

ARC Magazine

The May issue[3] includes:

- John Pelan "Archives and wellbeing", which calls for greater evidence of the wellbeing impact of archives: "By building a case for valuing archives and their potential to help people with a range of health conditions we can encourage better support for and investment in services." [p14] The article cites as an example Norfolk's "Change Minds" project which ran from 2015-2018:

    "Change Minds is a transformative archival adventure for people from North Norfolk and Norwich who live with mental health conditions and are on low incomes, carers, volunteers and staff. Researching two digitised 19th Century Norfolk County Asylum Case Books at Norfolk Record Office and Norwich Millennium Library, Change Minds engages local people and online visitors in

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[1] *Empowering collections*. Museums Association, 2019. Available to download from: https://www.museumsassociation.org/download?id=1262818. Assessed in *Network Newsletter*, 217, Mar 2019, available to download as a pdf from: https://www.seapn.org.uk/uploads/files/Newsletter-NS-217.pdf.

[2] See, for example: https://www.museumsassociation.org/campaigns/partnerships-with-purpose.

[3] *ARC Magazine*, 358, May 2019.

the stories it reveals during a fascinating investigation into local heritage, mental health and identity."[4]

Tackling social and digital exclusion – Government, Government Agencies and Local Government

Visit to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland: report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights

There was a short assessment in Newsletter 213[5] of the Statement[6] following this visit. The final report (including a short summary) has now been published[7].

The summary makes the report's position clear:

> "The Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Philip Alston, undertook a mission to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland from 5 to 16 November 2018.
>
> Although the United Kingdom is the world's fifth largest economy, one fifth of its population (14 million people) live in poverty, and 1.5 million of them experienced destitution in 2017. Policies of austerity introduced in 2010 continue largely unabated, despite the tragic social consequences. Close to 40 per cent of children are predicted to be living in poverty by 2021. Food banks have proliferated; homelessness and rough sleeping have increased greatly; tens of thousands of poor families must live in accommodation far from their schools, jobs and community networks; life expectancy is falling for certain groups; and the legal aid system has been decimated.
>
> The social safety net has been badly damaged by drastic cuts to local authorities' budgets, which have eliminated many social services, reduced policing services, closed libraries in record numbers, shrunk community and youth centres and sold off public spaces and buildings. The bottom line is that much of the glue that has held British society

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[4] See: http://changeminds.org.uk/.
[5] *Network Newsletter*, 213, Nov 2018, pp6-9, https://www.seapn.org.uk/uploads/files/Newsletter-NS-213.pdf.
[6] *Statement on Visit to the United Kingdom, by Professor Philip Alston, United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights*. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2018.
web version:
https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23881&LangID=E
pdf (includes footnotes):
https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Poverty/EOM_GB_16Nov2018.pdf.
[7] *Visit to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland: report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights*. United Nations General Assembly, Human Rights Council, 2019. Available to download as a pdf from:
https://undocs.org/A/HRC/41/39/Add.1?mc_cid=f5bfeabfff&mc_eid=17c19d737e.

together since the Second World War has been deliberately removed and replaced with a harsh and uncaring ethos. A booming economy, high employment and a budget surplus have not reversed austerity, a policy pursued more as an ideological than an economic agenda." [p1]

The report gives a brief overview of the position as Philip Alston found it, followed by Government reactions to the preliminary findings:

"14. The Government's response to the Special Rapporteur's preliminary findings has been mixed. The Prime Minister 'disagreed' with the preliminary statement […] and the Secretary for Work and Pensions was 'disappointed' […] by its language, though the Under-Secretary of State promised the Government would seriously consider the present report […]

16. The principal response, however, has been to fall back on two sets of talking points which fail to address the key concerns. One addresses employment. First, the unemployment rate is the lowest in 40 years, and there are 3.3 million more people in work than in 2010. The latter claim is true, but this is partly due to growth in the workforce over time, and because 2010 represented a low point following the global recession. Indeed, United Kingdom employment statistics mirror those experienced in recent years in many countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development […] Second, youth unemployment has dropped significantly. True, but this is also the case in Europe generally […] Third, 79 per cent of the jobs that have been created since 2010 are full-time. True, but even full-time employment is no guarantee against in-work poverty, which is a major and growing problem in the United Kingdom. In fact, in-work poverty rates outstripped the growth in employment in 2018.

17. The second set of talking points relate to poverty. The week after the Special Rapporteur presented his preliminary findings, the Prime Minister told Parliament: 'There are 1 million fewer people in absolute poverty today – a record low; 300,000 fewer children in absolute poverty – a record low; and 637,000 fewer children living in workless households – a record low. That is due to the action of this Government and the impact of Universal Credit.' […]

18. Several responses are in order. First, it is true that so-called 'absolute' poverty has fallen, but this is a selective, widely criticized and mostly unhelpful indicator, and the Government has failed to adopt an official poverty measure. Widely accepted independent measures find poverty is rising. Second, the reference point for the Government's statistics is 2010, the peak of the impact of the global recession. And third, living in a working household does not bring freedom from poverty, with nearly 60 per cent of those in poverty in a family where someone works, and in-work poverty on the rise […]

19. By consistently invoking these talking points, the Government has essentially foregone the opportunity to engage in a discussion about the real issues affecting poverty in the United Kingdom and refused to

acknowledge the seriousness of the problem. Impressive employment statistics are a cause for celebration, but they are no substitute for addressing the plight of the one fifth of the population that continues to live in poverty or the large numbers experiencing destitution." [p6]

The report then looks briefly at understanding poverty in the UK, setting the scene by showing how the 'social safety net' has been dismantled and illustrating shortcomings of Universal Credit.

It then goes on to look at how poverty is affecting specific groups: women; children; disabled people; older people; ethnic minority groups; asylum-seekers; and people in rural poverty.

To take two examples:

Ethnic minority groups:

"81. Ethnic minorities are at a higher risk of becoming homeless, have poorer access to health care and experience higher rates of infant mortality. Black people and people from a South Asian background are the most likely to live in poverty and deprivation,105 yet as a result of changes to taxes, benefits and public spending from 2010 to 2020, Black and Asian households in the lowest fifth of incomes will experience the largest average drop in living standards, about 20 per cent […] In England and Scotland, changes to public spending from 2010–2011 to 2021–2022 will fall the hardest on Black households […]

82. Gypsy, Roma and Travellers, who generally face multiple disadvantages, may be put at particular risk by 'digital by default' [Universal Credit] and by benefit cuts due to their larger family sizes, discrimination and educational barriers […]" [p17]

Asylum-seekers:

83. Destitution appears to be a design characteristic of the asylum system. Asylum seekers are banned from working and limited to a derisory level of support that guarantees they will live in poverty. The Government promotes work as the singular solution to poverty, yet refuses to allow this particular group to work. While asylum seekers receive some basic supports such as housing, they are left to make do with an inadequate, poverty-level income of around £5 a day […] They also face major barriers to health care. […]" [p18]

Finally, the report looks at the impact on the devolved administrations:

"85. Devolved administrations have tried to mitigate the worst impacts of austerity, despite experiencing significant reductions in block grant funding and constitutional limits on their ability to raise revenue [...]

86. But mitigation comes at a price, and is not sustainable. The Scottish Government said it had reached the limit of what it can afford to mitigate, because every pound spent on offsetting cuts means reducing vital

services. The mitigation package in Northern Ireland runs out in 2020, leaving vulnerable people facing a 'cliff edge' scenario. For devolved administrations to have to spend resources to shield people from government policies is a powerful indictment." [p18]

In terms of Wales:

"92. Wales faces the highest relative poverty rate in the United Kingdom, with almost one in four people living in relative income poverty […] Twenty-five per cent of jobs pay below minimum wage […] There is wide consensus among stakeholders that benefit changes are one of the structural causes behind the increase in poverty, rough sleeping and homelessness in Wales […]" [p19]

The Conclusion is also pointed:

"95. The philosophy underpinning the British welfare system has changed radically since 2010. The initial rationales for reform were to reduce overall expenditures and to promote employment as the principal "cure" for poverty. But when large-scale poverty persisted despite a booming economy and very high levels of employment, the Government chose not to adjust course. Instead, it doubled down on a parallel agenda to reduce benefits by every means available, including constant reductions in benefit levels, ever-more-demanding conditions, harsher penalties, depersonalization, stigmatization, and virtually eliminating the option of using the legal system to vindicate rights. The basic message, delivered in the language of managerial efficiency and automation, is that almost any alternative will be more tolerable than seeking to obtain government benefits. This is a very far cry from any notion of a social contract, Beveridge model or otherwise, let alone of social human rights. As Thomas Hobbes observed long ago, such an approach condemns the least well off to lives that are 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short'. As the British social contract slowly evaporates, Hobbes' prediction risks becoming the new reality." [p20]

Finally, the report makes a series of recommendations to the UK Government, primarily around defining and dealing with poverty (and Universal Credit).

Just Fair (whose email of 28 May alerted me to the publication of the final report) and Community Links had been one of the organisers of an event that Philip Alston attended – they issued a joint statement, welcoming the report, and concluded:

"The report is not legally binding on the UK. The response will be the government's, but the power of the UN will be yours, ours, as it will depend on what we all do with it.

We need a radical change to establish the sort of society we want to become. The past decade (and earlier) has seen community resilience, wellbeing and social rights undermined by austerity policies and welfare cuts. This small state programme, antithetical to the vision of Beveridge and others, has remade British society and denied many the chance to

thrive. As observed by Professor Alston: 'austerity could easily have spared the poor, if the political will had existed to do so'.

His report is an opportunity to establish our own new vision and to renew our commitments to real equality and social rights for all. Others did it before in the direst of circumstances. We can do it again."[8]

The report was also welcomed by charity Leonard Cheshire – their Chief Executive, Neil Heslop, said:

"'This final report is a stark indictment about our society and should be a wake-up call to the Government and all of us.

'Austerity has pushed many disabled people into further poverty, ill-health and social isolation at alarming rates."[9]

However, the Government's reaction was not as welcoming. According to a news-story in *The Guardian*:

"The work and pensions secretary, Amber Rudd, plans to lodge a formal complaint with the UN about the damning report on austerity in Britain by its special rapporteur on extreme poverty, Philip Alston.

Rudd will argue that Alston is politically biased and did not do enough research. The minister is seeking guidance from the Foreign Office on the best way to respond after Alston compared her department's welfare policies to the creation of Victorian workhouses […]

The government believes Alston, a New York-based human rights lawyer, could not credibly have reached his conclusions after only an 11-day trip to the UK. Last November he visited nine towns and cities in England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, holding town hall meetings and visiting poverty-related charities and organisations including food banks and youth programmes.

Rudd is said to be particularly frustrated by Alston's accusation that the government was responsible for the 'systematic immiseration of a significant part of the British population'. She also believes Alston ventured off his beat by making criticisms about cuts to police numbers and legal aid.

In a statement, the government said his report was 'a barely believable documentation of Britain based on a tiny period of time spent here' and 'a completely inaccurate picture of our approach to tackling poverty'."[10]

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[8] See: http://justfair.org.uk/philip-alstons-austerity-report-must-be-a-turning-point-for-social-justice-in-britain/?mc_cid=f5bfeabfff&mc_eid=17c19d737e.
[9] See: https://www.leonardcheshire.org/about-us/press-and-media/press-releases/response-philip-alstons-final-report.
[10] Robert Booth "Amber Rudd to lodge complaint over UN's austerity report", *The Guardian*, 22 May 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/may/22/amber-rudd-to-lodge-complaint-over-un-austerity-report.

This report is well worth reading, especially for its overview of the current UK position. Recommended.

Tackling social and digital exclusion – Other Agencies

Framing toolkit: talking about poverty

JRF and the FrameWorks Institute[11] have produced a toolkit[12] suggesting ways in which the discussion about poverty can be shaped by 'framing':

> "Framing means making deliberate choices about how you communicate. It's about understanding how people think and feel, and telling stories that change hearts and minds." [p3]

The aim is to change the discussion so that it doesn't then retreat to some commonly-held views:

- "Post-poverty: people don't believe poverty exists today, in this country.
- Self-makingness: people blame individuals for being in poverty, and believe they should try harder and work more. They don't see the wider context.
- The game is rigged: people think there will always be poverty and nothing will ever change." [p3]

The toolkit makes a range of key suggestions, for example for talking about how poverty can be solved:

> "'The economy we have today was designed – it is the result of a set of decisions that were made about our society's priorities and resources. Just as it was designed, we can redesign it so that it works for everyone.'" [p6]

Particularly useful is the list of what works – and what to look out for, for example [taken from p12]:

What works?	Watch out for
Leading with shared values of compassion and justice.	Leading with the economic benefits of reducing poverty.
Choosing messengers who embody these values.	Words that trigger the 'politics as usual' response.

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[11] "The FrameWorks Institute is a nonprofit think tank that advances the mission-driven sector's capacity to frame the public discourse about social and scientific issues." See: https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/.

[12] *Framing toolkit: talking about poverty*. JRF, 2019. Available to download as a pdf from: https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/framing-toolkit-talking-about-poverty?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=JRF%20weekly%20round-up%20wc%2022%20April%202019&utm_content=JRF%20weekly%20round-up%20wc%2022%20April%202019+CID_7b6ed7a64d939e4837c24c4f3e485136&utm_source=Email%20marketing%20software&utm_term=Find%20out%20more.

Showing how the economy restricts people's options and can lead to poverty.	Focusing on describing the problem and its prevalence and missing out the explanation of how it works.
Leading with poverty.	Opening with benefits as the issue.

and suggestions for an expanded vocabulary to help us make the point, eg around compassion and justice (Unjust; How can we treat people like this?; We live in a society where; This is simply not acceptable; Shouldn't write people off; We won't stand by and let this happen; As a society, we have seen; Levels of poverty in our communities; etc [taken from p13]); and some useful metaphors around restricts and restrains, and 'currents' (eg Head above water).

This is well worth looking at in terms of framing some of our own discussions …[13]

Diversity in books and other materials for children & young people

"Exploring Radicalism in Children's Literature"

Seven Stories[14] have just announced (in their "Collection Blog") that:

> "Over the coming months we are exploring the theme of radicalism in children's books. Through form, style or content – radical children's literature encourages readers to see the world and their place in it in new ways and from fresh perspectives and to challenge norms, not least of which is the perceived innocence of children and childhood and the need to preserve this.
>
> Throughout the 20th century and now 21st century we have witnessed a steady movement towards an increasing amount of radical children's and YA publishing that empowers children and young people to question the status quos, in terms of race, gender/sexual identity, prejudice and injustice in all forms, environmental issues and many other topics."

The first post gives a bit of background – this looks as though it's going to be an interesting series.[15]

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[13] Source: JRF *Weekly round-up*, 26 Apr 2019.
[14] Seven Stories, the National Centre for Children's Books, https://www.sevenstories.org.uk/.
[15] Source: email from Anne Harding, 24 May 2019.

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

The cultural learning evidence champion's handbook

The RSA has produced this valuable guidance[16]:

> "[…] to getting to grips with what we call the 'evidence agenda' in arts and cultural learning. Evidencing the difference your work makes to the people who take part and learning from how others have evaluated their work can help all of us improve and make arts and cultural learning stronger and more sustainable.
>
> The trouble is that it is *hard* and no one ever tells you what you need to be good at, to be good at using evidence. This handbook is designed to make it easier not only to 'do' evidence and evaluation, but to love them, to become a champion for them and spread the good word throughout arts and cultural education. Throughout the document we talk about the attitudes and the approaches that Evidence Champions take as well as the key skills they need. Beginners can be Champions, just as much as experts can, but you might want a little guidance when you're taking your first steps. That's why we cover some of the key knowledge and skills you'll need, as well as some things you can do right now." [p3 – emphasis theirs]

It's built around four themes:

- Source: gathering appropriate evidence to design projects for impact

- Lead: taking collective ownership of project evaluation

- Learn: collecting accurate evidence of what you have done, the difference you have made and how you might improve

- Share: supporting colleagues and peers across the sector to improve.

The handbook works through the steps we need to take, and does so in a helpful, practical way; for example, in the section on defining 'evidence':

> "Evidence = information that supports a claim or belief.
> Evidence is uncertain and contestable, it's not the same thing as proof."
> [p7]

It looks next at a key issue, "What does it mean to say that something 'works'?". There are dangers, in using evidence, that people 'over-claim', and the handbook is clear about ensuring, as far as possible, that this does not happen,

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[16] Mark Londesborough *et al. The cultural learning evidence champion's handbook*. The RSA, 2019. Available to download as a pdf (kb) from: https://www.thersa.org/globalassets/pdfs/reports/rsa-cultural-learning-evidence-champions-handbook.pdf.

by suggesting that claims satisfy three conditions (and, for each, gives examples of how this evidence could be collected):

- The cause is covariant with the effect

- The cause always precedes the effect

    E.g. if your project improves test scores, then…

    – children's test scores will always increase after they take part

    And not

    – that children already likely to score highly on tests were the ones taking part.

- That all alternative explanations have been ruled out. [Taken from p8]

This is followed by a handy, short look at "How much of a difference can I claim to be making?"

The handbook then works through each of the four themes in detail, with, for example, key skills required'; lists of resources; suggestions of ways of working, etc.

Finally, it has two appendices. The first offers a template for the Evaluation Commitment for Cultural Learning:

> "Your commitment should articulate how meaningful evaluation can support your whole organisation's priorities, developmental goals and sustainability. This template provides a starting point for your conversations with colleagues and for developing your organisation's commitment to evidence-rich practice." [p40]

The second, "How do I… raise the topic of evaluation?", is a very practical guide to starting 'awkward conversations' about evaluation, with suggestions for conversations between:

- Schools & cultural learning organisations/ independent artist practitioners
- Cultural learning organisations & independent evaluators
- Grantee & funder
- Artist practitioners & cultural learning organisations.

Useful, practical guide – recommended.[17]

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[17] Source: National Criminal Justice Arts Alliance *News*, Feb 2019.

Abbreviations and acronyms

ACE = Arts Council England
BAME = Black, Asian and minority ethnic
JRF = Joseph Rowntree Foundation
RSA = Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce

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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:

John Vincent
Wisteria Cottage
Nadderwater
Exeter EX4 2JQ

Tel/fax: 01392 256045
E-mail: john@nadder.org.uk   April 2019