

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 ...?

Museums Journal

The Jan/Feb 2023 issue includes:

- Simon Stephens “Who do we think we are?” [Editorial] which reflects on the changes in society as indicated in the latest census data¹ [p3]
- Geraldine Kendall Adams “Winners and losers”, which gives an overview of the latest ACE funding allocations [pp4-5]
- Geraldine Kendall Adams “Fighting for survival”, which looks at the plight of civic museums [pp6-7]. Of particular note is a quote from Victoria Hollows (CE of OneRen – the trust that runs Renfrewshire’s museum service):

“It’s not good enough to say we’ve just got to be able to keep the lights on [...] Museums’ critically important work with communities to deliver on social justice is at risk.” [p7]

- Jonathan Knott “It’s time to be open-minded”, which looks at the work that museums and galleries are undertaking to support people experiencing mental health difficulties² [pp10-11]
- “Vox pop” column: “How can we make sure culture has a higher profile in climate policy?” [p15]
- Tamsin Russell “We need to make wellbeing a priority [...]” [“Policy” column], drawing on the MA’s research and campaign³ [p17]
- Imogen Wood “The National Trust wants to help visitors realise climate change solutions” [“Comment” column], which outline’s some of the NT’s initiatives and also refers to the Climate Heritage Network⁴ [p17]
- Jonathan Knott “Sea change”, which looks at some of the exhibitions, events and projects that art galleries are using to create responses to the climate crisis [pp18-23]
- Thembi Mutch “A sense of place”, which argues that it is time for more investment in the intangible heritage across Africa” [pp24-27, 29]

¹ See, for example: <https://census.gov.uk/census-2021-results/phase-one-topic-summaries>.

² The Article draws on research work by the Baring Foundation (supported by the MA) – see: https://baringfoundation.org.uk/blog-post/creatively-minded-at-the-museum/?gclid=EAlalQobChMIrsy95ai_AIVSNDtCh2IWQO-EAAYASAAEgKJo_D_BwE.

³ See: <https://www.museumsassociation.org/campaigns/workforce/wellbeing-research/>.

⁴ See: <https://www.climateheritage.org/>.

- Holly Black “Young blood” [“Focus” column], which looks at ways that museums are engaging with young people [p56-57, 59, 61]
- Holly Black “Working with young people on the climate emergency” [“In Practice” column], which looks at work at the NHM and Salisbury Museum [p63]

ARC Magazine

The Sep/Oct issue⁵ includes:

- “Revealing the lived experience of Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic People in Wales” [news item], which reports that:

“The Archives and Records Council Wales was recently awarded funding to complete the first phase of a project to improve awareness of, and access to, cultural collections for people within Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities in Wales.”⁶ [p29]

The Nov/Dec 2022 issue⁷ includes:

- Kathrin Meyer and Karel Berkhoff “Connecting Holocaust researchers to their answers: what archivists can do to strengthen the field”, which argues that “[...] archivists have a vital role to play in helping societies deal openly and accurately with the past.” [pp18-21]
- Richard Wragg “The work continues – an update on the Diversity Allies” [pp24-25]

Information Professional

The Dec 2022 issue is digital only. Key items include:

- “Financial support in times of crisis”, which outlines the role of the CILIP Benevolent Fund⁸ [p5]
- Nick Poole “*We are CILIP* – one year on”, in which CILIP’s CEO assesses the impact of the new strategy and action plan [pp13-15]
- Rob Green “Devolved and united in 2022”, which looks at the work of CILIP Cymru Wales, CILIP Ireland and CILIP Scotland. Highlights include CILIP Cymru’s publication of their report, *Decolonising libraries: where do*

⁵ *ARC Magazine*, no.388, Sep/Oct 2022.

⁶ “The first phase of the project has been to produce a toolkit, to establish a survey methodology for collections, and to produce the roadmap for further development.” The resources produced are available at: <https://archives.wales/archives-and-records-council-wales/arcw-projects/black-asian-and-minority-ethnic-communities-in-wales/>.

⁷ *ARC Magazine*, no.389, Nov/Dec 2022.

⁸ Further info at: <https://www.cilip.org.uk/page/benevolent>.

*collection policies and acquisitions fit in?*⁹, and their subsequent £135,000 funding from the Welsh Government to take forward work to support the Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan¹⁰ by developing Anti-Racist Library Collections.

- “Libraries and sanctuary”, John Vincent interviewed by Rob Green about his book, *Libraries and Sanctuary ...* [pp30-31]

Books for Keeps

In the Nov 2022 issue¹¹, Darren Chetty and Karen Sands-O’Connor continue their “Beyond the Secret Garden” series of columns with “Listen to This Story! From Archive to Exhibition”¹², which tells the background to the exhibition, “Listen to This Story!”, the first exhibition entirely focused on the history of children’s literature by and about Black Britons [pp18-19]. (On a personal note, this piece brought back so many memories of books that I had used for storytelling and with young people when I was a Children’s Librarian ...)

Diversity in books and other materials for children & young people

Reflecting realities: survey of ethnic representation within UK children’s literature 2017–2021

The latest¹³ in the “Reflecting Realities” series of reports has just been published.

The main findings include:

- “Annual reporting shows an increase in the number of children’s books published featuring a minority ethnic character from 4% in 2017 to 20% in 2021.
- The percentage of books published with a main character from a racially minoritised background has risen year on year but remains extremely low at 9% in 2021.
- Representation in Fiction remains low and lags significantly behind increases in Picturebooks and Non-Fiction.” [Taken from website]

The report says that:

⁹ Oddly, I have been unable to find a link to this report so far!

¹⁰ See, for example: <https://www.gov.wales/anti-racist-wales-action-plan>.

¹¹ *Books for Keeps*, 257, Nov 2022, <https://booksforkeeps.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/BfK-257-November-2022-hi-res-single-pages.pdf>.

¹² Further info at: <https://www.sevenstories.org.uk/exhibitions/listentothisstory>.

¹³ *Reflecting realities: survey of ethnic representation within UK children’s literature 2017–2021*. CLPE, 2022, https://clpe.org.uk/system/files/2022-11/CLPE%20Reflecting%20Reality%202022%20WEB_0.pdf.

“The year on year increase in the percentage of characters of colour featured in commercial children’s literature between 2017 and 2021 is a very positive indicator of the raised consciousness of the importance of ensuring more inclusivity within the publishing industry.” [p12]

“However, the industry is not yet at the place in which this conscious practice is consistently translating into the meaningful presence of characters from racially minoritised backgrounds. Instead, what the review team has observed is that the range of presence continues to be varied. At times the presence is problematic and poorly executed and at others it is too insignificant to have any real weight.” [p12]

The report goes on to look in more depth at some of the spread of titles published, and, in doing so, makes some other valuable points, for example:

“***The Boys*** written by Lauren Ace, illustrated by Jenny Løvlie and published by Little Tiger, follows four boys as they grow from toddlers into men. It empathetically and eloquently explores variations of positive masculinity. Their ethnicity was incidental and carefully stated through the illustration, and their characterisation was varied and non-stereotypical. This was one of a number of examples in which the submissions conveyed broader representations that incorporated multi-faceted and intersectional portrayals.

Both ***The Boys*** and Anna McQuinn’s ***Lulu’s Sleepover*** convey these intersectional components through subtle but very clear acknowledgement of the sexuality of key cast members. From moments like the beautiful same sex wedding scene in ***The Boys*** through to Lulu enjoying the company of her lesbian aunties, the depictions in both titles manage to strike a fantastic balance of infusing the pages with love and joy, whilst also making the portrayals feel very every day and matter of fact in their essence. These details are particularly important given the traditionally marked absence and deliberate erasure of LGBTQ+ characters in this area of publishing.” [p14 – emphasises theirs]

Finally – and usefully – the report includes a set of “Questions to Guide Considerations” which help us to assess:

- Whether characters of colour have a “meaningful presence”
- Whether breadth and balance have been achieved, for example: “Are readers able to encounter varied portrayals of characters of colour, depicted with a range of personalities and represented as experiencing a full spectrum of emotions in the books you produce/ stock?” [p21]
- Whether “the creatives” seem to have been valued: “Is there a sustained investment in both established and new authors from a range of backgrounds who are able to paint characters and worlds with the integrity that the subject matter deserves? Does your output/ stock reflect this diversity of talent?” [p21]

There is more about the methodology used to create the reports in a blogpost¹⁴ from CLPE.

To finish with a comment in the Foreword by Louise Johns-Shepherd:

“We are determined that this more reflective landscape won’t be a ‘trend’ that disappears or that dips. We will continue to do this work because we believe in the power of children’s literature to change lives and we believe meaningfully inclusive representative casts of characters in children’s literature make books better.” [p3]

Recommended.¹⁵

Representation of people of colour among children’s book creators in the UK (2020-2021)

In addition, BookTrust have just published the latest report¹⁶ as part of their “BookTrust Represents” programme¹⁷.

“While we are seeing a year-on-year increase in books by creators of colour, we are still far from an equitable culture of reading, creating and publishing children’s books. In 2020, we set a target for 13% of children’s books to be created by authors and illustrators of colour by 2022. Our analysis of a dataset of children’s books published in the UK in 2021 reveals that, if recent increases are sustained, the sector could well be on track to reach that target.” [p6]

The report identifies some of the “enablers” that have led to this progress, including:

- Strong relationships with publishers and long-term investment in careers
- Genuine allies and advocates in publishing companies
- Increased awareness of the issues around representation
- Creators of colour reclaiming the space
- School visits

¹⁴ Farrah Serroukh and Louise Johns-Shepherd “Reflecting Realities, the methodology behind the report”, CLPE, 9 Nov 2022, <https://clpe.org.uk/blog/reflecting-realities-methodology-behind-report>.

¹⁵ Source: CILIP School Libraries Group *Newsletter*, 19 Dec 2022.

¹⁶ Melanie Ramdarshan Bold. *Representation of people of colour among children’s book creators in the UK (2020-2021)*. BookTrust, 2022, <https://cdn.booktrust.org.uk/globalassets/resources/booktrust-represents/2022/research-reports/booktrust-represents-representation-of-people-of-colour-among-childrens-book-creators-in-the-uk.pdf>.

¹⁷ “BookTrust Represents is a programme created to promote and improve the representation of people of colour in children’s books so that all children read a range of books that reflect them and their wider communities.” See: <https://www.booktrust.org.uk/what-we-do/programmes-and-campaigns/booktrust-represents/#!?q=&sortOption=MostRecent&pageNo=1>.

At the same time, it also identifies continuing barriers to progress, including:

- Superficial or opportunistic engagement with diversity and inclusion
- Rush publishing and lack of investment in creators of colour
- Financial security and equity
- Experiences of racism and fear of speaking out
- Psychological impact of minoritisation

The research makes the following recommendations:

- “Maintaining industry wide exploration, reflection and focus for meaningful and sustained change.

As a sector we can work to ensure changes are long term and meaningful through deep engagement with issues central to exclusion and healthy discourse around what good children’s literature looks like.

- Recognising, taking action on and keeping under review organisational processes that discriminate against creators of colour.

This requires transparency and review of any processes and practices that may discriminate against creators of colour (from organisational culture to business models, and from pay to support structures).

- Recognising, connecting and empowering allies and advocates who champion the work of creators of colour.

This study found that positive experiences and outcomes are often associated with allies and advocates championing the creative efforts of creators of colour. Protected spaces where genuine allies and advocates from across publishers can connect could empower and support positive changes.

- Supporting children’s creators of colour and other disadvantaged creators to connect and raise their voices within the sector.

There are benefits to creators in shaping and maintaining their own protected spaces where they can exchange ideas, share experiences and find mutual support. Several interviewees call for safe spaces for different groups facing challenges to inclusion in children’s literature to connect, educate and raise their voices.” [p9]

Important research, recommended.¹⁸

¹⁸ Source: CILIP School Libraries Group *Newsletter*, 19 Dec 2022.

LGBTQ+ issues – Libraries, Museums, Archives and Cultural and Heritage Organisations

Banning of LGBTQ+ books and other library materials [continued]

“Russian libraries start pulling LGBTQ+ books from shelves as Putin signs ‘propaganda’ law”

This news-story¹⁹ reports that:

“Moscow libraries and booksellers are removing LGBTQ+ books from shelves amid crackdowns on queer authors and materials [...]

Four Moscow libraries have reportedly removed the books, after being told “over the phone” to pull them from shelves.

An anonymous source told the Russian publication *The Village* that employees from libraries in Moscow’s Central Administrative Districts received orders to remove books that are also critical of the war in Ukraine [...]

Vladimir Putin signed an expanded ‘LGBT propaganda’ law on Monday (5 December).

Legislation currently bans all LGBTQ+ media directed at children, under punishment of fines ranging up to 5 million roubles (£68,327) or 15 days in prison for non-nationals.

The new law extends the ban to all ages.”

Now for a positive story:

“Parents of trans kids ‘delighted’ to have Christine and the Queens reading CBeebies bedtime story”

“Christine and the Queens, also known as Redcar, will read a bedtime story to kids across the country via CBeebies on New Year’s Day.

CBeebies’ *Bedtime Stories* airs every evening on the channel, with each day bringing a different celebrity with a book to read.

But on New Year’s Day 2023, Christine and the Queens, who is genderqueer and uses he/him pronouns, will become the first trans-CBeebies celebrity to read to kids.”²⁰

¹⁹ Amelia Hansford “Russian libraries start pulling LGBTQ+ books from shelves as Putin signs ‘propaganda’ law”, *PinkNews*, 6 Dec 2022, <https://www.thepinknews.com/2022/12/06/russia-moscow-libraries-lgbtq/>.

²⁰ Lily Wakefield “Parents of trans kids ‘delighted’ to have Christine and the Queens reading CBeebies bedtime story”, *PinkNews*, 15 Dec 2022, <https://www.thepinknews.com/2022/12/15/christine-and-the-queens-cbeebies-bedtime->

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

Libraries Connected strategic plan 2023-2027

In Nov 2022, Libraries Connected published their strategic plan²¹ for the next four years.

“The plan presents a set of key projects and priorities for the next five years, with a focus on creating a more diverse library workforce, building a robust evidence base on the impact of libraries and developing a stronger voice for the sector as it works with local and national government.

The plan is structured around four core areas of action: **drive, grow, connect and engage**. These are underpinned by principles of sustainability, diversity, collaboration and financial stability with a commitment to working both nationally and regionally.” {Taken from website, emphasis theirs]

It begins by re-emphasising their vision:

“Our vision is for an inclusive, modern, sustainable and high-quality public library service at the heart of every community. Modern public libraries should be the cornerstone of the community, delivering a diverse range of services meeting local needs around information, learning, literacy, employment and digital skills, health, culture and leisure.” [p3]

This is followed by an outline of their model of change for 2023-2027, and then summaries of the four core areas:

Drive

“We drive innovation by gathering evidence and testing new ideas at a national scale. We create insight and intelligence that individual library services can apply to their current needs and future plans: social, financial, and environmental [...]

Our goal is for all public library services to reach more people with more impact.” [p5]

Grow

[story-trans-genderqueer/?utm_source=piano&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=mypinknews&pnespid=7qhsUzxEMvxHg.7Lvyu2TZCduwPyW5wuluSwyuVnvABmHbnkU_D3b7oy2qrAtLeR8b.8VMMUYQ.](https://www.librariesconnected.org.uk/news/libraries-connected-publishes-new-strategic-plan)

²¹ *Libraries Connected strategic plan 2023-2027*. Libraries Connected, 2022, <https://www.librariesconnected.org.uk/news/libraries-connected-publishes-new-strategic-plan>.

“We develop and foster skills for change within our own organisation and throughout the public libraries sector. We build leadership skills and provide senior managers with the tools to lead high quality library services rooted in evidence and best practice. We support the creation of an inspired and inclusive new generation of library workers, helping build a workforce that truly reflects the communities it serves.

Our goal is for public library services to have the skills and diversity to be vital and enduring community institutions.” [p5]

Connect

“By connecting individual public library services we amplify the efforts of our members and the sector as a whole. This allows us and our sector to promote a shared understanding of the value of libraries and their role in tackling society’s biggest challenges, including inequality and climate change. Our events, online networks, and regional capacity-building programmes create powerful professional communities and decentralised leadership, which helps create a resilient libraries sector.

Our goal is to enable collaboration which creates greater ambition and more effective action, amplifying the work of our members and partners.” [p5]

Engage

“We represent our sector and our members. We influence local and national decisionmakers with evidence, insight and policy proposals that realise the unique potential of public libraries. We provide clear value to our members, while serving the public library sector as a whole.

Our goal is for those within and beyond our sector to champion public libraries and invest in their potential, which in turn strengthens the benefits libraries provide to society.” [p5]

That section is followed by a reiteration of the five principles that underpin their work:

- Support climate responsibility and sustainability
- Promote equality, diversity and inclusion
- Harness connection and collaboration
- Support sustainable financial models
- Operate at national and regional scale

For us, the second principle is possibly the most significant, Promote equality, diversity and inclusion:

“Our focus here is two-fold: developing our own approach to equality, diversity and inclusion as an organisation, and supporting inclusive practice across the public library sector. Our aim is for public libraries to be exemplars of inclusive, diverse and accessible public services. Our three main areas of work will be:

- Developing the diversity and inclusiveness of our Board and organisation as we recruit a new set of external trustees in January 2023.
- Building on the Leading Libraries programme with new initiatives to foster a more inclusive and diverse library workforce at all levels. This includes our work on career pathways and next generation skills which is key to making career routes in the sector more transparent, and more attractive to people from diverse backgrounds.
- Using the Universal Library Offers and our innovation programmes to help libraries ensure their stock, events and activities reflect the communities they serve. This will be supported by a new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion learning programme for the whole of the public library workforce.” [p6]

In the ‘Action Plan’ section, the following specific action is listed:

- “Launch an equality, diversity and inclusion learning and development programme for library services.” [p14]

I attended the online launch of the Strategy on 3 Nov. Key points from that included:

- Emphasis on public libraries being a statutory service
- Importance of advocacy
- Creation of regional networks (plus networks for Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and crown dependencies)
- Creation of a new Data Observatory now
- Creation of a Futures Hub ready for 2030
- Aiming to widen engagement with Libraries Connected, not just via heads of service
- Aiming to be more proactive (and less reactive) with news stories etc
- There will be an increased media profile, with advocacy and lobbying
- Providing briefings on major topics, eg Warm Spaces (and, to come: business & economic development; adult literacy; school readiness)

This is a strong strategic plan: we need to ensure that its voice is heard!²²

Abbreviations and acronyms

ACE = Arts Council England

CEO = Chief Executive Officer

CILIP = Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals

CLPE = Centre for Literacy in Primary Education

²² Source: email from Libraries Connected, 10 Nov 2022.

MA = Museums Association
NHM = Natural History Museum
NT = National Trust

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