

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 ...?

Information Professional

The Jul/Aug issue is the digital one (available to CILIP members). Amongst other articles, it includes:

- “CILIP guide launched for ‘controversial materials’ advice” [News item, p5] – and the advice was launched on 20 Sep¹.
- “Report finds public library funding crisis in Wales” [News item, p5], which refers to a report to the Welsh Parliament²
- “Public libraries delivering public value” [News item, p6], which introduces the report by Libraries Connected East [see below]
- “Former President shows support to US librarians” [News item, p10], which briefly reports on Barack Obama’s comments on the growing number of attempted book bans in the US
- “Libraries are key solution to £63 billion problem” [News feature, p12], which covers the recent report from the House of Lords Communications and Digital Committee³, which notes the continuing high levels of digital exclusion, and the role that public libraries can play in tackling this.
- Morag Clarkson and Carol Smith “Improving our understanding” [“Insight” column], which focuses on the requirement in the healthcare sector to provide services and support for people with learning disabilities and with autism⁴. The article also includes info about/links to other initiatives, including CILIP Scotland’s “Accessibility and Neurodiversity Resources”⁵; and Tanya Milligan (Falkirk Libraries)’s presentation, “Autism Inclusion for Libraries”, on how libraries can create inclusive spaces for autistic staff and users that benefit all⁶ [p22].
- “New voices” – two articles by speakers at the terrific CILIP Conference “New Voices, New Ideas” session: Marlène Rak “An exhilarating milestone” focused on work at the University of the West of England, for

¹ This will be covered in a future Newsletter.

² Welsh Parliament. Local Government and Housing Committee. *Local authority leisure and library services*. Welsh Parliament, 2023, <https://senedd.wales/media/3fdmwwiv/cr-ld15967-e.pdf>.

³ See: <https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/170/communications-and-digital-committee/news/196028/the-government-has-no-credible-strategy-to-tackle-digital-exclusion/>.

⁴ See: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/oliver-mcgowan-draft-code-of-practice/oliver-mcgowan-draft-code-of-practice-on-statutory-learning-disability-and-autism-training>.

⁵ See: <https://www.cilips.org.uk/accessibility-and-neurodiversity>.

⁶ See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S4qXqWNtX20>.

example by providing platforms to enable their voices to be heard [pp24-25]; and Sarah Simpson “Bright lights. Voices. Terror”, which looked at her work as a mentor at the University of West London [pp28-29].

- Mary-Rose Grieve “Great School Libraries campaign” [“Insight” column], an update on the campaign’s progress⁷ [p27]
- Kirsten Elliot “Gender identity and the library management system” [“Insight” column from the CILIP LGBTQ+ Network], which argues that LMSs should reflect the range of identities that library users want to have, rather than limiting them to a set few [p28]
- “The horizon scanning department for public libraries”, an interview with Luke Burton (Director, Libraries at ACE) by Rob Mackinlay, looking at the fast-changing role of public libraries – and the need to have people able to take on these challenges [pp32-35].

***The Bookseller* [online]**

The Sep issue⁸ is the “Library Focus” issue (available to read for free for CILIP members). Amongst other articles, it includes:

- Lauren Brown “Librarians ready for ‘sudden’ arrival of AI, but concerns about risks to ecosystem remain” [pp6-7], which includes comments from Nick Poole, Richard Ovenden and Isobel Hunter who:

“[...] agrees different libraries are taking, and need, different approaches. ‘It’s a really pressing issue for academic libraries or law libraries, or health libraries, for example, when they are thinking about searching and using information and how research is generated. I think for public libraries it’s different. They will have a really important role in helping citizens get to grips with understanding AI and what it means. For public libraries, with the strong role they already have in digital inclusion and digital literacy, I think AI literacy needs to be woven into that.’” [p7]

- Alison Tarrant “School of thought” [“Opinion” column], which looks briefly at the latest developments of the Great School Libraries campaign:

“We are also developing a framework for school libraries; showing how every school can take a step towards being a Great School Library, and the potential impact of making small or large changes to the school library set-up.” [p10]

- The “In the Spotlight” column includes, for example:
 - Coventry Libraries Services’ “Digital Spaces” project⁹ [p12]

⁷ See: <https://www.greatschoolibraries.org.uk/>.

⁸ *The Bookseller*, 1 Sep 2023.

⁹ See, for example: <https://www.thespace.org/commission/coventry-libraries-digital-spaces/>.

- Portsmouth Libraries, with an interview with Julie Duffy, their Visual Impairment Officer [p12]
- Guille-Allès public library, Guernsey, which “[...] celebrated its 140th anniversary last year by hosting a free exhibition called Boundless Curiosity, which went on to win this year’s Libraries Connected award for Culture and Creativity.”¹⁰ [p13]
- Leeds Libraries’ Wellbeing Pods [p13]
- Suffolk Libraries Compassionate Communities book collections: “Book collections to support people through bereavement were launched at several Suffolk libraries in the spring of 2023. The Compassionate Communities book collections are available at various libraries across the county, including Stowmarket, Lowestoft and Ipswich. The books in the collections cover a range of bereavement-related issues, with the aim of helping adults and children cope with grief.”¹¹ [p15]

Books for Keeps

The latest issue¹² includes:

- Darren Chetty and Karen Sands-O’Connor “Jewish representation in British children’s books” in their excellent “Beyond the Secret Garden” series [pp12-14]

Health & Wellbeing issues – Libraries, Museums, Archives and Cultural and Heritage Organisations

Libraries for living, and for living better: the value and impact of public libraries in the East of England

This new report¹³ from Libraries Connected Eastern Region aims to support the “[...] development of an evaluation tool that would help measure, manage, and evidence the impact of social connections in libraries [...]” [p9]

The report and evaluation tool have been created by UEA, CreativeUEA¹⁴, and UEA Health Economics Consulting:

¹⁰ See: <https://www.visitguernsey.com/experiences/events/quille-alles-library-boundless-curiosity-exhibition/>.

¹¹ See, for example: <https://www.suffolklibraries.co.uk/about/news/compassionate-communities-book-collection-launch>.

¹² *Books for Keeps*, 262, Sep 2023, <https://booksforkeeps.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/BfK-262-Sep-2023-hi-res-single-pages.pdf>.

¹³ John Gordon *et al.* *Libraries for living, and for living better: the value and impact of public libraries in the East of England – report for Libraries Connected East, June 2023*. UEA Publishing Project, 2023, <https://www.librariesconnected.org.uk/resource/libraries-living-and-living-better>.

¹⁴ “CreativeUEA builds on UEA’s longstanding history of creativity and innovation - across the arts, sciences, social sciences and enterprise – to explore new areas of

“Libraries Connected East asked us to create a credible, replicable and recognisable methodology for articulating the impact of social engagement with public libraries. They also asked us to look at the value and impacts of public libraries around three themes: digital inclusion, health and wellbeing, and children’s literacy [...]”

The report presents a valuation tool which we created to estimate the monetary value of library service impacts, for example, in terms of benefit for taxpayers or at the level of families using a particular service at a branch library. We also present ten case study examples of stakeholder engagement with public libraries in the Eastern region.” [p10]

One of the overall headlines (which was picked up by the media) was:

“Library services in England can generate social benefits to their communities to a value of at least £3.4bn per year in relation to the three value dimensions we investigated. This is based on a conservative estimate of 50% of libraries offering services in the way that aligns with the methodology we have used.” [p18]

For me, the more interesting findings were around the impact of libraries by three themes: digital inclusion; health, wellbeing and independent living; and children’s literacy and associated outcomes.

Examples from each are:

Digital inclusion:

- “Libraries offer individuals and communities many forms of help and support for communication (e.g. email, social media), printing (e.g. CVs, returns labels, tickets) and engaging with government services (e.g. bus passes, blue badges, passports, housing, schools). For many people, the help available through digital services and resources also addresses wider health issues they may experience, particularly isolation, and enables them to participate in society [...]”
- “Library facilities and support are critical and often effective in reducing the impact of these factors. However, the support offered varies because of perceived privacy or data protection concerns, staff skills and availability. Improvements in process and systems design could address these barriers” [p20]

Wellbeing and independent living:

- “Library services offer activities that impact directly on the wellbeing of adults, such as physical activities and mental health initiatives. They also offer activities which impact indirectly on them and their social networks, through adult education, convening groups to support parents, carers

interdisciplinary research, learning, action and outreach.” See: <https://www.uea.ac.uk/creative>.

and families, people with long-term health conditions and their carers, and intergenerational group activities [...]

- Tangible outcomes for participants joining these activities include physical activity, socialisation and finding employment, which can improve their wellbeing and reduce mental health issues. Many less tangible impacts include the effects of trust, volunteering, experience of leading groups, learning new skills, community service and long-term intergenerational benefits. Library services provide opportunities for people to improve their employment, health and to socialise. These are three key indicators for wellbeing outlined by the Office of National Statistics, which also link the three themes investigated for this report (health, children's literacy, and digital inclusion)." [p21]

Children's literacy and associated outcomes:

- "Library programmes have value and impact on post-Covid literacy recovery by providing rich experiences and stimulating environments for speaking, listening, reading and writing. Literacy activities are interactive and face to face, with impacts on children's socialisation and confidence [...]
- By addressing the whole family unit, libraries provide services and advice which help families to support their children's literacy at home and beyond their direct involvement in specific library programmes. For many children and their families, library programmes provide free access to a wealth of books and resources that they would not otherwise encounter [...]
- Library programmes have important impacts on children's literacy that complement but differ from the impacts of literacy learning in schools. Library programmes develop 'living literacy', for example, by linking literacy with day-to-day experiences like making a meal at home, or by providing the kit for children to try out science experiments with household objects. The programmes link literacy with family relationships, and help develop science and health literacies. Importantly, the model of literacy in the evaluated programmes is non-judgemental." [p22]

The case studies also give valuable insights into provision, and there are 'worked examples' of how to calculate the economic benefits.

Finally, the report has a number of recommendations to add to the value and impact of public libraries. These include:

- Review marketing, signage and online access for library services, including assessing whether the library is still perceived as a 'quiet space'
- Develop liaison and sharing best practice between library services and other partners

- Improving digital provision
- Understanding the impacts of library services on health, wellbeing and independent living
- Extending the reach of services supporting children’s literacy (eg for teens and older teens)
- Further evaluation of services.

Lastly, the report lists some areas for improvement identified by participants in workshops:

- “Engage more with those who do not currently use library services in learning how to encourage library use
 - Link with the external partners to address community gaps in resources and services
 - Standardise services where possible
 - Increase outreach for those who are homeless by providing meal vouchers
 - Automatic enrolment, especially for areas of deprivation
 - Collaborate more with primary schools
 - Work with local General Practitioners to obtain suitable health information to pass on to library service users
 - Use of appropriate tools to advertise library activities
 - Co-locating services and cross-promotion of services with local organisations
 - Lifelong learning consultations with marginalised people who feel they have not been served by schools or libraries in their lives
 - Remove time limits on computers and allow use until the next booking
 - Expansion of programmes for maternity services – support groups for pregnant and new mums and increase health literacy among this group.”
- [p90]

This is an important report – and the tools included could be very useful too. Recommended.¹⁵

Migration issues – Other Agencies

“Refugee and migration charities must stop upholding the status quo”

In this article¹⁶ for “Civil Society”, Fizza Qureshi, the Migrants’ Rights Network’s [MRN] Chief Executive, “[...] argues that charities must campaign for transformative change rather than concessions from policy makers.”

¹⁵ Source: *News from CILIP*, 12 Jul 2023.

¹⁶ “Fizza Qureshi: Refugee and migration charities must stop upholding the status quo”, “Civil Society” (“Voices” series), 16 Aug 2023,

It makes some very interesting points, at the core of which is:

“We all work in this sector because we want to reduce suffering and fight for what is right. But often, our desire for immediate change can cause us to become indifferent, and accept concessions at the expense of our end goals.

Equity for migrants and racialised people cannot be achieved through our current systems. They are inherently racist and colonial in nature, and so there is no fixing what is purposefully designed to oppress.

We must as a sector look towards abolitionist alternatives centred on collective care. This involves ending the criminalisation of migration in all its forms, including ending surveillance, detention, and deportation.”

She also argues the importance of understanding the causes of migration, for example by moving beyond seeing it as a single issue and needing to consider “[...] the intersections between migration and various structures of oppression.”

“At MRN, we know that we cannot talk about migration, and the contemporary discourse surrounding who is welcome in this country, without also talking about colonialism, race and class.”

She goes on to say that:

“The sector unintentionally often focuses on the ‘hardworking’ nature of migrants or their ‘contributions’. This is because it has internalised the government’s divisive narratives. This keeps the system intact: it pits different marginalised communities against each other, and assigns value or worth to human life based on one’s level of ‘contribution’.”

In terms of our own work, I find her next argument really powerful:

“EDI initiatives love to throw around the phrase ‘lived experience’. At MRN, we have been on a journey with this phrase and how it relates to our strategy.

Ultimately, possessing lived experience does not always mean that someone will also possess progressive values.

Uncritically accepting someone’s problematic values or behaviours simply on account of their marginalised identity, is antithetical to building solidarity and transformational change.

This is why we are both lived experience-led and values-led, since liberation goes beyond representation. We believe that those with lived experience, whose values of compassion are directly informed by their personal lives, are best placed to transform our society for the better.”

<https://www.civilsociety.co.uk/voices/fizza-queeshi-refugee-and-migration-charities-must-stop-upholding-the-status-quo.html>.

Finally, she argues that we need to develop a culture of humility:

“When faced with criticism, we have used this as an opportunity to grow, instead of resorting to deflection. We have realised that our good work in some areas does not absolve us of causing harm in other ways, and we recognise that our learning journey is a lifelong one.

Once we recognise that we still have so much work to do as a sector, only then can we change our approach to growth. Showing true solidarity to migrants and racialised communities involves a willingness to always do better. This can be uncomfortable, but it is necessary.

We must all adopt a culture of humility: we shouldn’t gaslight or be on the defensive when we receive criticism, but should thank those who call us out for their time and energy. Let’s be accountable to each other, and to ourselves.”

Recommended.¹⁷

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

Banning of LGBTQ+ books and other library materials [continued] and Protests against Drag Queen Storytimes

“Queer Irish people and allies form human chain to protect library from anti-LGBTQ book protest”

The local community helps protect Cork City Library:

“A crowd of counter-protestors formed a human shield around a city centre library in Ireland, enabling it to remain open despite a right-wing rally taking place on the street outside.

Cork City Library has been the focus of right-wing anger ire for months, with people harassing library staff in an attempt to get LGBTQ+ books removed from its shelves.

On Saturday (2 September), about 300 people turned out in support of the library and its staff, and in opposition to the Ireland Says No rally, which was organised by conservative groups.

The city council was previously forced to shut the library during another demonstration, out of fear for the safety of staff.”¹⁸

¹⁷ Source: Migrants’ Rights Network *Newsletter*, Sep 2023.

¹⁸ Sophie Perry “Queer Irish people and allies form human chain to protect library from anti-LGBTQ book protest”, *PinkNews*, 5 Sep 2023, https://www.thepinknews.com/2023/09/05/cork-city-library-protest-lgbtq/?utm_source=piano&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=mypinknews&pnespid

LGBTQ+ issues – Government, Government Agencies and Local Government

“UK government announces crackdown on gender-neutral toilets”

According to a recent article¹⁹ in *PinkNews*:

“The UK government has today announced a new building requirement which will prevent gender-neutral toilets in new, non-residential buildings.

A policy announced on Sunday (13 August) as part of the government’s Levelling Up scheme revealed requirements for all new builds to separate male and female toilets, which it argues is to ‘protect single-sex spaces’.

‘The change comes amid dignity and privacy concerns from women and elderly people who feel they are being unfairly disadvantaged as publicly accessible toilets are increasingly being converted into gender-neutral facilities,’ the statement alleges.”

Abbreviations and acronyms

ACE = Arts Council England

AI = Artificial Intelligence

CILIP = Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals

EDI = Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

LMS = Library Management System

MRN = Migrants’ Rights Network

UEA = University of East Anglia

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¹⁹ Amelia Hansford “UK government announces crackdown on gender-neutral toilets”, *PinkNews*, 13 Aug 2023, https://www.thepinknews.com/2023/08/13/gender-neutral-toilets-policy-kemi-badenoch/?utm_source=piano&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=mypinknews&pne_spid=6711DD0aOLgRxPPYvje3GYyG4RSvDJAvleqnzrY5pBdmUrLMIutiYNRrJLN8j9n5jpDXlxyFxA.