

# 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](http://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 Sep 2023 issue includes:

- “Funding for pilot projects to connect people to research” [News], which announces the projects which have been chosen as part of a British Academy project to explore new ways of engaging with research in SHAPE topics (social sciences, humanities and the arts for people and the economy)<sup>1</sup> [p6]
- “Data poverty report impact” [News], which highlights the findings of the APPG on Data Poverty<sup>2</sup> [p12]
- Rob Green “Safe and inclusive: putting principles into practice”, which introduces CILIP’s new guidance, *Managing safe and inclusive public library services: a practical guide*<sup>3</sup> [pp14-15]
- “Get involved and ‘Go Green’ this Libraries Week”, which highlights Green Libraries Week (2-8 Oct)<sup>4</sup> [p24]
- “Getting a handle on sector development”, an in-depth interview with Luke Burton (Director, Libraries at ACE) by Rob Mackinlay, outlining ACE’s role and how this fits into the libraries’ overall framework [pp26-29]

### **Pen & Inc.**

The Autumn/Winter 2023 issue includes:

- Jake Hope “Our Rights! – Children’s Rights”, which introduces a new anthology of writing around the rights of children and young people<sup>5</sup> [pp12-15]

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<sup>1</sup> See: <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/news/high-demand-for-british-academy-pilot-funding-connecting-scholars-with-regional-cultural-partners-to-engage-the-public-with-new-research/>.

<sup>2</sup> See: <https://www.datapovertyappg.co.uk/news/the-data-poverty-appgs-second-state-of-the-nation-report>.

The full report is *Data Poverty APPG State of the Nation Report 2*. Data Poverty APPG, 2023,

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/601151bbe2079953e95f9aaa/t/650197147c122a34aa1c000b/1694603034725/Data+Poverty+APPG+State+of+the+Nation+Report+2.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> *Managing safe and inclusive public library services: a practical guide*. CILIP, 2023. See: <https://www.cilip.org.uk/page/safe-and-inclusive-guide>. There will be further coverage of this in a future Newsletter.

<sup>4</sup> There is further info, including about the Green Libraries Network, at: <https://www.cilip.org.uk/page/greenlibrariesgetinvolved>.

<sup>5</sup> Jake Hope (ed). *Our Rights! Stories and poems about Children's Rights*. Otter-Barry Books, 2023. Further info at: <https://www.otterbarrybooks.com/books/our-rights!>.

- “Expressions and connections through stories: an interview with Richard O’Neill” by Jake Hope, which looks at Richard’s own work<sup>6</sup> and also introduces books about Travellers [pp16-18]
- Reza Dalvand “Understanding our rights: a childhood journey of discovery and empowerment”, which looks at work by the Iranian author and illustrator, particularly his latest book<sup>7</sup> [pp19-21]
- Jake Hope “Introducing Inclusive Books for Children”, which highlights the new website and award<sup>8</sup> [pp22-25]
- Phyllis Ramage “Challenging the stereotypes and why we need new perspectives”, which looks at the author’s career and work, particularly focused on her current role as a judge for the Yoto Carnegies [pp26-29]

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

### ***Trans-inclusive culture: guidance on advancing trans inclusion for museums, galleries, archives and heritage organisations***

This very timely new guidance<sup>9</sup> from RCMG:

“[...] has been developed by the University of Leicester’s Research Centre for Museums and Galleries (RCMG) with legal scholars and trans inclusion and equality experts in the context of growing uncertainty and anxiety surrounding trans-inclusive practice across heritage, arts and cultural organisations of all kinds.”

It starts by reiterating the need to see this guidance as being part of an ethical framework, building on the Equality Act 2010 and, particularly, the Public Sector Equality Duty [PSED] under which:

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<sup>6</sup> See: <https://richardthestoryteller.weebly.com/>.

<sup>7</sup> Reza Dalvand. *I have the right: an affirmation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Scribe, 2023. Further info at: <https://scribepublications.co.uk/books-authors/books/i-have-the-right-9781915590084>.

<sup>8</sup> “Inclusive Books for Children is a charity that aspires for mainstream children’s books to be inclusive, and for inclusive children’s books to be mainstream. Along the way, we hope to nurture a new generation of open-minded and inspired young book lovers [...] At IBC, we make it easy for time-pressed parents and caregivers to find and buy these excellent books with confidence by reviewing as many books as we can, and presenting the very best picks to you.

Our review process is carried out by experts in children's literature, all of whom are champions of inclusivity and free from any commercial influence.” [Taken from: <https://www.inclusivebooksforchildren.org/about>].

<sup>9</sup> Suzanne MacLeod *et al.* *Trans-inclusive culture: guidance on advancing trans inclusion for museums, galleries, archives and heritage organisations*. RCMG, 2023, <https://le.ac.uk/rcmg/research-archive/trans-inclusive-culture>.

“[...] public sector cultural organisations in the UK already have a legal responsibility to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity for those with protected characteristics and foster good relations between those who share protected characteristics and those who do not.” [p6]

The guidance comes straight to the point:

“Recent case law has meant that ‘gender critical’ beliefs [...] - alongside other beliefs - are now protected under the Equality Act. This has generated some uncertainties and challenges for those striving to create and maintain organisational cultures and environments that are inclusive and safe for trans people.” [p6]

The guidance reiterates that the PSED:

“[...] allows cultural organisations to be proactive in publicly promoting trans-inclusive environments. Organisations such as museums that are not trans-inclusive could be discriminating against individual staff and customers, and creating a trans-inclusive organisation (for example, by adopting trans-inclusive policies and guidance that cover harassment and bullying against trans people) does not conflict with equality duties to prevent discrimination against (or foster inclusiveness for) any other protected characteristic group.” [p13]

This guidance is really important, as, rather like when Clause 28 first came into law, this recent change in the law could well be having a deterrent effect. (After Clause 28 took effect, there were many examples of libraries, museums, publishers, art galleries etc deciding that they had better not publish, display, or promote LGBTQ+ material in case they were breaking the law.<sup>10</sup>) The guidance makes it absolutely clear that we can (and must) continue to promote trans-inclusive policies.

It emphasises the role of an ethical framework which, in this case, focuses on four key questions:

- How can we develop trans-inclusive displays, events and public programming?
- How can we work with trans communities to advance trans inclusion?
- How can we generate a trans-inclusive organisational culture?

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<sup>10</sup> There is a stark warning in a recent interview with Ian McKellen, “Sir Ian McKellen has expressed fears of a return of Thatcher’s infamous Section 28, as the government considers new guidance that could ban social transitioning in schools.” Ali Condon “Ian McKellen worries about the return of Thatcher’s Section 28: ‘Things aren’t looking good’”, *PinkNews*, 15 Sep 2023, [https://www.thepinknews.com/2023/09/15/ian-mckellen-section-28/?utm\\_source=piano&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=mypinknews&pnespid=6L45UziGJLNKi.XDoTu0D8Kcugz1C5duJ\\_Khwr3pwdmeDRquHivD18.qNTLZ20\\_nLyyjUMWA](https://www.thepinknews.com/2023/09/15/ian-mckellen-section-28/?utm_source=piano&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=mypinknews&pnespid=6L45UziGJLNKi.XDoTu0D8Kcugz1C5duJ_Khwr3pwdmeDRquHivD18.qNTLZ20_nLyyjUMWA).

- How can we provide a warm welcome to (and ensure the safety of) trans visitors?

and then goes on to give examples of some of the ways that these questions could be answered.

The remainder of the guidance consists of “Scenarios” which are a very useful way of exploring these points in a more in-depth, practical way.

This is a very important set of guidelines which are immensely practical and timely. It is particularly useful to have the re-emphasising of the need for museums (and other organisations) to continue to make provision for the whole community, including people who identify as LGBTQ+. (On a personal note, I think it’s a pity that it has not been extended to libraries too, as this would have been extremely useful.)

Recommended.

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### ***A year of hate: anti-drag mobilisation efforts targeting LGBTQ+ people in the UK***

This is an important new report<sup>11</sup> from the Institute for Strategic Dialogue [ISD]<sup>12</sup>.

“Research by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) has found that in the year since June 2022, anti-drag mobilisation in the UK has become a key focus for a variety of groups and actors. Antivaxxers, white nationalist groups, influential conspiracy theorists and ‘child protection’ advocates have at times formed an uneasy – even fractious – coalition of groups opposing all-ages drag events. The driving force behind these protests is a mix of far-right groups and COVID-19 conspiracists.” [p4]

The report recognises that:

“While public debate about what is appropriate entertainment for children, and at what ages, is absolutely legitimate and deserves fair hearing, the identified tactics used by these actors only serve to undermine that discussion with chilling consequences for free expression, and create fertile ground for a potential uptick in violence.” [p4]

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<sup>11</sup> Aoife Gallagher. *A year of hate: anti-drag mobilisation efforts targeting LGBTQ+ people in the UK*. Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2023, <https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Anti-Drag-Mobilisation-Efforts-Targeting-LGBTQ-People-in-the-UK.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> “The Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) is an independent, non-profit organisation dedicated to safeguarding human rights and reversing the rising tide of polarisation, extremism and disinformation worldwide.” Further info at: <https://www.isdglobal.org/about/>.

It also shows that there is a strong US influence on what is happening in the UK:

“Furthermore, our analysis has found evidence that the UK is importing anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric and strategies from similar movements in the US, with the ‘groomer’ slur - used to frame LGBTQ+ people as a danger to children - becoming commonplace among anti-LGBTQ+ campaigners.” [p4]

It is worth quoting the key findings in full here:

“ISD found a total of 57 all-ages drag events targeted during the period analysed. Of these 57:

- Protesters were present at 51 events
  - 10 of these events were cancelled ahead of time
  - The protests regularly involved harassment and abuse of performers, staff, parents and police, with a number of violent clashes as well as arrests reported.
- The majority of these events (49) took place between the end of July 2022 and the end of August 2022 when Drag Queen Story Hour (DQSH) embarked on a tour across libraries in the UK.
- The protesting and harassment of drag events was organised and attended by individuals with varied ideologies and beliefs, including white nationalists, sovereign citizen groups, conspiracy theorists, anti-vaccine activists and child protection groups.
- The events targeted in 2023 also drew the attention of a number of Conservative Party politicians, a noteworthy example of how such activity is being mainstreamed.
- In April 2023, a man involved in anti-drag mobilisation was convicted of hate crimes for publishing statements online accusing a drag queen of ‘grooming children’.” [p5]

The report briefly sets out the timeline (between June 2022 and May 2023) and context:

“The first event targeted was a DQSH [Drag Queen Story Hour] due to take place in the CLIP Theatre in London on 11 June 2022 [...] The event was organised by the nursing union the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) and was planned as a story time event for toddlers and children under the age of seven. The event was cancelled after the RCN received a barrage of messages that it said were ‘discriminatory, homophobic, transphobic and exclusionary.’” [p8]

Next:

“In mid-May 2022, DQSH announced its UK summer tour, comprising 69 shows in libraries across 20 cities and regions in England and Wales, beginning on 25 July and ending on 1 September. The events were to consist of Aida H Dee, the drag persona of UK DQSH founder Sab Samuel, reading several children’s books that she had written in an entertaining pantomime style in libraries.

Two weeks before the start of the tour, the full list of DQSHUK events was widely shared in communities on Telegram popular with far-right activists and conspiracy theorists, with posts encouraging members to protest [...]” [p8]

The report then outlines the “key actors”, ie the groups and individuals leading these protests, and looks at their alignments.

The next section of the report highlights “key tactics” used by these groups. these included:

- Protesting: “Parents taking their children to DQSH events, staff working in libraries and law enforcement were often subject to verbal abuse and harassment by protesters in attendance.” [p14]

“As well as events that were protested in person, ISD also found 10 events that were cancelled ahead of time due to threats and backlash received by the libraries hosting the events and the risk of violence due to potential protests.” [p14]

- Calling libraries to complain ahead of the events
- Leafleting local areas
- Email campaigns.

The report also identifies key narratives used in these protests. This is important, as it helps us see where the protests are coming from and also how they may link to parallel protests in the US. Narratives include:

- Drag performers are paedophiles<sup>13</sup> or hurting children: complaints have suggested that the performances were “highly sexualised”. In addition:

“Sovereign Citizens attempting to make ‘citizen’s arrests’ of drag performers have referenced ‘child sexual laws’ in these attempts. And one woman who has frequently called venues attempting to have drag events cancelled has referenced ‘Adrenochrome’ in her

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<sup>13</sup> See, for example: Amelia Hansford “Tate Britain anti-drag protester convicted of public order offence over paedophile rant”, *PinkNews*, 8 Aug 2023, [https://www.thepinknews.com/2023/08/08/tate-britain-aida-h-dee/?utm\\_source=piano&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=mypinknews&pnespid=seh7UHUdOb4I3ufFtGmvApbQuRuqW591N.HtkPI58BFmHtXE\\_Wk\\_jTzbQXwubqFvdN4eZzVMjw](https://www.thepinknews.com/2023/08/08/tate-britain-aida-h-dee/?utm_source=piano&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=mypinknews&pnespid=seh7UHUdOb4I3ufFtGmvApbQuRuqW591N.HtkPI58BFmHtXE_Wk_jTzbQXwubqFvdN4eZzVMjw).

complaints [...] drawing on the QAnon conspiracy theory belief that children are ritually abused and have their blood extracted for consumption by Satanic paedophiles.” [p16]

- Drag performers are “indoctrinating” children: “The specific charge is sometimes that they are trying to instil a belief in ‘gender ideology’ or a ‘transgender agenda’.” [p16]

Finally, the report notes that the UK has dropped from 1<sup>st</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> position in the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association’s (ILGA-Europe) review of LGBTQ+ rights in Europe, and 2022 figures show “homophobic hate crimes doubling and transphobic hate crimes tripling over the previous five years” [p17] .

It concludes:

“[...] UK activity is reflective of similar activity tracked by ISD in the US, Australia and France. Although the UK has not experienced the violent extremes of the US, the presence of identical narratives and similar tactics is indicative of the transnational influence on the UK movement.” [p17]

However:

“While this kind of activity has the potential to become mainstreamed further in the UK, it is also important to acknowledge the presence of counter protesters, which often outnumbered those opposing the drag events. Moreover, the vast majority of events tracked by ISD went ahead as planned despite threats and intimidation, a sign that despite the use of intimidatory tactics, this kind of activity has had little material success so far.” [p17]

This is a very important, if grim, report and deserves to be widely read and circulated so that we can become more aware of the tactics being used by groups and individuals to try to stop LGBTQ+ and drag events from going ahead.

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

**“Illinois signs law preventing book bans: ‘Regimes ban books, not democracies’”**

This article<sup>14</sup> shows that there is still strong opposition to book-banning:

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<sup>14</sup> Jake McKee “Illinois signs law preventing book bans: ‘Regimes ban books, not democracies’”, *PinkNews*, 14 Jun 2023, [https://www.thepinknews.com/2023/06/14/illinois-book-ban-law-jb-pritzker/?utm\\_source=piano&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=mypinknews&pnespi](https://www.thepinknews.com/2023/06/14/illinois-book-ban-law-jb-pritzker/?utm_source=piano&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=mypinknews&pnespi)



“The state’s Democratic governor, J. B. Pritzker, enacted the bill on Monday (12 June) that will see public libraries be ineligible for public funding if they restrict access to materials ‘because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval’ [...]

In a speech ahead of the signing, which was shared online by local media outlet Heartland Signal, Pritzker highlighted that many people argue for book bans on the basis that ‘it’s about protecting children’.

The governor said: ‘Of course we all want to protect our children so they’re reading age-appropriate material, but banning books isn’t about that at all.

Book bans are about censorship, marginalising people, marginalising ideas and facts. Regimes ban books, not democracies.”

The Governor went on to point out that:

“[...] there were 67 attempts to ban books in Illinois last year, with most being about ‘coming of age, mental health, LGBTQ+ kids and teens, the Black experience and racism’.”

### **“Mum responsible for countless banned books vows to keep up campaign ‘as long as it takes’”**

This article<sup>15</sup> explores in more depth the actions of one woman in the US, who “[...] has said she won’t stop until she gets all the ‘sexually explicit books out’.”

There seems to be an increasing trend towards describing any LGBTQ+-positive book as “sexually explicit”.

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<sup>15</sup> Maggie Baska “Mum responsible for countless banned books vows to keep up campaign ‘as long as it takes’”, *PinkNews*, 29 Sep 2023, [https://www.thepinknews.com/2023/09/29/book-ban-usa-school-lgbtq-jennifer-petersen/?utm\\_source=piano&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=mypinknews&pnespid=5rVkuDYdOKIAxfve9j3tEcnXphGjXp8ufPfi2fo1sR5mQcMHHIXa35GmbRtVFSIVtuzJBWsdg.](https://www.thepinknews.com/2023/09/29/book-ban-usa-school-lgbtq-jennifer-petersen/?utm_source=piano&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=mypinknews&pnespid=5rVkuDYdOKIAxfve9j3tEcnXphGjXp8ufPfi2fo1sR5mQcMHHIXa35GmbRtVFSIVtuzJBWsdg)

## Abbreviations and acronyms

ACE = Arts Council England

APPG = All Party Parliamentary Group

CILIP = Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals

DQSH = Drag Queen Story Hour

ISD = Institute for Strategic Dialogue

PSED = Public Sector Equality Duty

RCMG = Research Centre for Museums and Galleries

RCN = Royal College of Nursing

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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:

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