

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 Sep/Oct 2023 issue is a themed one, “Anti-ableism”.

The whole issue is well worth reading – it includes important pieces on representation, discrimination, and accessibility, with some examples of good practice including:

- Wellcome Collection “Being Human” exhibition¹
- Wellcome Collection “In Plain Sight” exhibition²
- People’s History Museum “Nothing About Us Without Us” exhibition³
- Norwegian Museum of Deaf History and Culture⁴
- The Lyme Museum:

“We are the first museum dedicated to exploring the lived experiences of invisible illnesses and disabilities through materiality and storytelling. We collect objects, stories, flat lays and artworks with one aim: making the invisible visible, one flat lay and one story at a time.”⁵

A couple of articles has been made more widely available too:

- Sam Bowen “Sensory storytelling and sign language training will engage nonverbal visitors”, which has lots of brief, practical advice:

“Think of communication as coming in two halves: that which is understood (received communication) and that which is given (expressive communication), and consider how you can do these things without relying on words.” [p12]⁶

- Pierrette Squires “When it comes to creating accessible spaces, one size definitely doesn’t fit all”, which looks at developments at Bolton Museum; it has lots of practical advice, including:

“Being open and honest in online access pages that some may not have their needs met is important.

Working with your local communities is crucial. Ask nearby support charities and groups what they want, and consult them when planning events and exhibitions.

¹ See: <https://wellcomecollection.org/exhibitions/XNFfsxAAANwqbNWD>.

² See: <https://wellcomecollection.org/exhibitions/Yv95yBAAAILuCNv6>.

³ See: <https://phm.org.uk/exhibitions/nothing-about-us-without-us/>.

⁴ See: <https://norsk-dovemuseum.no/en>.

⁵ See: <https://www.thelymemuseum.org/about>.

⁶ See: <https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/opinion/2023/09/sensory-storytelling-and-sign-language-training-will-engage-nonverbal-visitors/#msdynttrid=K56kT9aLSpEToY4VI5fhvrCA1x6Zqig8BJ7waEckiZs>.

Actively invite groups to events that are accessible to them. Proactive communication builds trust when people feel wanted in the space.

But expect to face anger, as those of us who have been excluded don't expect to be included – it takes time to build trust. Accept that there will be challenges, and meet criticism with an enquiring mind, not defensiveness. There is not a single solution to being welcoming and accessible.

Above all, be open and honest – online, in person and in advertising – about who is and who is not able to access your spaces and events. One size definitely doesn't fit all." [p14]⁷

Finally, there is a very useful list of resources, books and organisations [pp64-65].

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

“Hungary museum director sacked over LGBTQ+ exhibition”

According to the article⁸ in *PinkNews*:

“The director of Hungary’s National Museum in Budapest has been dismissed after allowing under-18 visitors into an LGBTQ+ exhibition.

The World Press Photo exhibition featured shots of LGBTQ+ people in the Philippines taken by photojournalist Hannah Reyes Morales.

Hungarian government officials claim that museum director Lazlo Simon failed to meet ‘legal obligations’ with the exhibition by allegedly letting under-18s view the exhibition – a claim that Simon has denied.”

The sacking was also picked up by other media, including *The Guardian*⁹ and the BBC¹⁰.

⁷ See: https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/opinion/2023/09/when-it-comes-to-creating-accessible-spaces-one-size-definitely-doesnt-fit-all/#msdyntrid=JMCZI6_SMBOqZQTSTF4SXXYn4TcDQusatfh3pvUSxW0.

⁸ Ali Condon “Hungary museum director sacked over LGBTQ+ exhibition”, *PinkNews*, 7 Nov 2023, https://www.thepinknews.com/2023/11/07/hungary-museum-director-sacked-lgbtq-exhibition/?utm_source=piano&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=mypinknews&pne_spid=uaF5EyRCNPqb2uuRp2_0DIjU5UmsT5t4Lu_x2rZq9wJmAghvscesQf.otTVcqGq0njn96mJheQ.

⁹ Philip Oltermann “Hungary sacks museum chief for not enforcing under-18s ban at LGBTQ+ exhibition”, *The Guardian*, 7 Nov 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/nov/07/hungary-national-museum-director-fired-lgbt-homosexuality-laws>.

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

“Moms for Liberty members call cops on librarians after teen checks out YA novel”

This article¹¹ really highlights the threat that (US) school librarians face:

“Two Moms for Liberty members in Florida called police on a number of school librarians, claiming that they had distributed ‘pornography’ to minors by allowing a teen to check out a YA novel [...]”

The book in question was a copy of the YA novel by Jennifer L. Armentrout, *Storm and fury*¹² - *School Library Journal* described it as:

“The action and suspense build with each chapter, making this a compelling read. Readers will anxiously await the next installment in this series, and libraries will find it difficult to keep this one on the shelf.”¹³

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

REVEAL: Reinforcing Ethics and Values for Effective Advocacy for Libraries

The REVEAL Project, funded via the CILIP Scotland Research Fund, was led by David McMenemy from the University of Glasgow. It:

“[...] sought to consider effective advocacy for library and information services through the lens of the ethics and values of the profession and what the practising of these values on a day-to-day basis across the profession contributes to society.”

It was launched in Oct 2023 with an online learning session, the recording of which is available on the CILIPS website¹⁴.

¹⁰ James FitzGerald “World Press Photo exhibition: Hungary museum head sacked over LGBT content”, BBC News, 7 Nov 2023, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-67334871>.

¹¹ Ali Condon “Moms for Liberty members call cops on librarians after teen checks out YA novel”, *PinkNews*, 7 Nov 2023, https://www.thepinknews.com/2023/11/07/moms-for-liberty-cops-teen-ya-novel/?utm_source=piano&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=mypinknews&pnespid=ueZIUD8fNriEq6fevz6xQpaRvxOoVYt8NPStxPNx.wxmsKrs.0wPYHghRezRCi2JBYg4uvLKtw.

¹² This is book 1 in “The Harbinger” series, Inkyard Press, 2019.

¹³ See: <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Storm-Fury-Elements-Jennifer-Armentrout-ebook/dp/B07D8VJNKH>.

¹⁴ See: <https://www.cilips.org.uk/reveal/>.

The project outputs include a paper¹⁵ written by David McMenemy, which explores the key concepts; this includes:

- Advocacy Strategies
- A look at different types of advocacy – and the likely impact they will have
- How to engage with diverse views
- Ethical Theories and Social Justice – which includes issues around welfare, freedom, and virtue (“For ancient philosophers like Aristotle the notion of a virtuous life informed the concept of living the good life and being a good person. The cultivation of virtue was the highest aspiration for a human being.” [p25])
- “Key Writers on Library Ethical Values and Professional Codes of Practice”
- Current ethical issues, such as freedom of access, censorship, Intellectual Property Rights
- Wider societal issues, such as diversity and inclusion, wellbeing, and sustainability (and, for example, placing this work within the context of the Equality Act 2020)
- How this fits into a libraries-specific context, for example the different types of argument and ethical issues involved in the outcry about Drag Queen Story Hours – and how you might tackle the different ‘rhetorical’ themes.

The paper concludes:

“It is hoped that this review provides the guidance, and discussion of the contextual background of providing a library service in the midst of a world cursed with increasing polarisation of opinion and culture wars. It is hoped that this review document provides enough reflective discussion for librarians and interested stakeholders of all backgrounds to understand their own position more fully and also reflect on the positions of those they may disagree with, with the ultimate goal to consider how best to serve their users amidst the tensions and dilemmas they face.” [p66]

For me, one of the most interesting areas is the discussion of neutrality. I do not believe that anything is neutral (and therefore to claim that a library is neutral is avoiding a number of major questions); however, there is a big gap here in terms of what might replace neutrality – as David McMenemy says:

¹⁵ David McMenemy. *Ethics and values-driven advocacy and libraries: exploring key concepts*. CILIPS, 2023, <https://www.cilips.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/REVEAL-final-v2.pdf>.

“Nevertheless, there is a strong argument from both within the profession and without that we are either in, or approaching, a post-neutrality world with regards to ethics, and if so, we must expend much more effort in shaping what that world will look like.” [p45]

At the online session, he threw out a challenge – which really does need to be picked up – about how we should deal with this ... if libraries aren't neutral, what are they?

As well as the paper, the project outputs include a series of ten videos with supporting infographics:

- What is advocacy?¹⁶
- Ethical theories and key ethical thinkers in libraries¹⁷
- The CILIP Ethical Framework¹⁸
- Privacy and libraries¹⁹
- Freedom of expression and libraries²⁰
- Ethics of information organisation²¹
- Intellectual property and libraries²²
- Contemporary ethical concerns in library provision²³
- Experiences of the Scottish library workforce²⁴
- How to do values-driven advocacy²⁵

This is an important piece of work which needs to be widely read – and acted upon.

Recommended.

Abbreviations and acronyms

YA = young adult

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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- ¹⁶ See: <https://www.cilips.org.uk/reveal-1/>.
¹⁷ See: <https://www.cilips.org.uk/reveal-2/>.
¹⁸ See: <https://www.cilips.org.uk/reveal-3/>.
¹⁹ See: <https://www.cilips.org.uk/reveal-4/>.
²⁰ See: <https://www.cilips.org.uk/reveal-5/>.
²¹ See: <https://www.cilips.org.uk/reveal-6/>.
²² See: <https://www.cilips.org.uk/reveal-7/>.
²³ See: <https://www.cilips.org.uk/reveal-8/>.
²⁴ See: <https://www.cilips.org.uk/reveal-9/>.
²⁵ See: <https://www.cilips.org.uk/reveal-10/>.