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

Number 280, June 2024

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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.

Contents List

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Did you see …?

Information Professional

The Sep 2024 issue includes:

- "Untold black ballet in public libraries" [News], which highlights the important touring exhibition, "Into the Light: Pioneers of Black British Ballet"[1] [p5]

- "New award for library reading projects" [News] [p6], which introduces this latest addition to The British Book Awards:

  > "This addition to *The Bookseller*-run annual awards will celebrate the best reading project or campaign delivered by a UK or Ireland-based library, and marks the return of libraries to the ceremony. The aim of the award is to recognise libraries' innovation in reaching new readers and strengthening community ties, with regional and national winners to be announced in the run-up to the event."[2]

- "Libraries need recognition in creative industries" [News], which highlights the Libraries Connected paper[3] [p8]

- "One in twenty public libraries 'lost' since 2016 – worst in deprived areas" [News], which reports some BBC research that "[…] shows the poorest areas were four times more likely to have permanently lost a library than the richest." [p9]

- "Staying professional in a storm" [News Feature], in which Denise Jones (Liverpool Libraries) talks about what happened when Spellow Library was attacked [pp12-13]

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[1] "Funded by a £245,500 grant from The National Lottery Heritage Fund, Into the Light: Pioneers of Black British Ballet will bring together archive photography, film, newspaper articles and posters alongside new video and audio interviews to trace the history of Black British ballet from the 1940s to the present day.

A unique partnership between Oxygen Arts and Libraries Connected, the membership body for public libraries, will see the exhibition tour 25 libraries, starting in Stockport and Redbridge this October and continuing until November 2025." [Taken from the website]

There is more info – and details of the tour – at: https://blackbritishballet.com/articles/new-exhibition-celebrates-ballets-black-pioneers.

[2] Taken from: https://www.thebookseller.com/news/the-british-book-awards-launches-new-prize-for-public-libraries.

[3] *Public libraries and the creative industries: briefing note.* Libraries Connected, 2024, https://www.librariesconnected.org.uk/sites/default/files/2024-10/Libraries%20and%20creative%20industries.pdf.

- Sue Williamson "The power of communities" ["Insight" column] [p14], which also starts with the attack on Spellow Library but then focuses on "community spirit" – and the key role that libraries play in their communities:

  > "We have a unique ability to reach millions of people through our school libraries, our public libraries, our academic libraries, our health libraries and our specialist libraries, such as the House of Commons Library that ultimately keeps our legislators informed. The CILIP Libraries Change Lives campaign has elicited over 180 individual stories that reflect this. We can use them to illustrate the community impact that libraries have with our politicians, both local and national.
  >
  > Over the coming months, we need to position ourselves prominently as the force for impact in our communities that we are, by constantly reinforcing the mantra "We can do that" when government is looking for ways to reach communities. The Spellow Library example has proved the concept in spades. Our conference and member network programmes help us develop the offer.
  >
  > This has never been more important at a time when so many library services across the sector are under threat of reductions in staffing and hours and ultimately of closure. The way to fight this is ultimately to show value, ability to contribute and the benefits of investment in all libraries in all settings."[4]

- Louis Coiffait-Gunn "100 days and counting – building connections", in which CILIP's new CE reflects on the sector and what he is discovering about it. The article also includes a round-up of recent/current CILIP initiatives [pp15-17]

- Caroline Ball "Neurodiversity in Libraries: creating a supportive space for all" ["In Depth" column], which introduces the Neurodiverse Library and Information Staff Network (NLISN)[5] and its work. This is a terrific article, highlighting the need for this new Network and its aims, and also Caroline's own "journey with neurodiversity" [pp24-26]

- Stéphane Goldstein "Media and information literacy: a fresh start with a new school curriculum?" ["In Depth" column], which looks at the potential for introducing a more thorough approach to teaching media & information literacy[6] as part of the current curriculum review[7] [pp38-40]

- Nick Cavender "The importance of school libraries in teaching about misinformation and disinformation" ["Insight" column], in which the CILIP

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[4] Taken from: https://www.cilip.org.uk/news/news.asp?id=681592.
[5] See: https://nlisn.org/.
[6] See: https://mila.org.uk/.
[7] See: https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/curriculum-and-assessment-review.

School Libraries Group Chair argues the vital importance of the work that school libraries undertake [p41]

- Rob Green "It's good to be green: sustainability at the heart of libraries" ["In Depth" column] which talks about the importance of Green Libraries Week in Oct[8] and highlights the conference taking place later in Nov[9] [pp43-44]

Tackling social and digital exclusion – Other Agencies

Changing stories together

The NLT published its new strategy[10] earlier this year:

"This strategy explains how the National Literacy Trust will change life stories between 2024 and 2027." [p1]

The strategy highlights the four ways in which they will work to "empower people with the literacy skills to succeed in life." [p6] These include:

- By directly supporting literacy skills and building confidence.
- By helping professionals increase the quality of literacy provision.
- By standing side by side with communities to tackle literacy inequality.
- By influencing leadership and policy to create lasting change.

To develop their priorities for the new strategy, they:

"[…] have identified the three changes which would have the biggest impact on our vision for a more equal society, driven by literacy. We refer to these as 'Breakthroughs'." [p7]

These three "Breakthroughs" are:

Breakthrough 1: Every child starts school with language and communication skills ready to grow and learn at school

Breakthrough 2: Every young person, wherever they grow up, leaves school with literacy skills for life

Breakthrough 3: Everyone leaving the criminal justice system has improved literacy skills to help them thrive.

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[8] There is more info about the Green Libraries Campaign at: https://www.cilip.org.uk/general/custom.asp?page=greenlibraries.
[9] See: https://www.cilip.org.uk/page/greenlibrariesconf24.
[10] *Changing stories together*. National Literacy Trust, 2024, pdf: https://nlt.cdn.ngo/media/documents/Strategy_final_25.03.24_-_low_res.pdf, web version: https://literacytrust.org.uk/about-us/our-strategy/.

To achieve these, the NLT has identified a number of actions for each – the following includes just some examples for each Breakthrough:

Breakthrough 1

1. By directly supporting literacy skills and building confidence

    *   In the midst of the cost of living crisis, we will give families 150,000 books and literacy resources so they can feel confident to chat, play and read with their children
    *   We will run local campaigns to raise awareness of the significance of early speech and language and empower parents to change their behaviour

2. By helping professionals increase the quality of literacy provision

    *   We will work with 300 settings in the communities of the UK facing the biggest challenges, training, supporting and inspiring staff

3. By standing side by side with communities to tackle literacy inequality

    *   By 2027, we will have 20 teams on the ground in the communities with the biggest poverty and literacy challenges. All these teams will be working to support early speech, language and communication, as part of Early Words Matter campaign

4. By influencing leadership and policy to create lasting change

    *   Following the launch of the Literacy All-Party Parliamentary Group's report Building Firm Foundations, we will campaign for a commitment to early language and literacy as a priority in the 2024 General Election and the new Parliament [Taken from p8]

Breakthrough 2

1. By directly supporting young people's literacy skills and building their confidence

    *   1,001,500 children and young people will take part in our literacy interventions and projects in schools
    *   We will distribute 1,500,000 books and literacy resources targeting the 1 in 12 children who don't own a book of their own

2. By helping professionals increase the quality of literacy provision •

    *   We will create 1,500 libraries in schools who currently don't have one, giving a further 525,000 children access to a school library
    *   We will train and support the professional development of 19,000 teachers and school leaders

3. By standing side by side with communities to tackle literacy inequality

- By 2027, National Literacy Trust local teams and local campaigns will be working with 9,500 schools in the areas of the UK with the biggest literacy challenges

4. By influencing leadership and policy to create lasting change

- Our Libraries for Primaries campaign will work with the Government and the publishing industry to develop and fund a sustainable development model for universal primary school library provision in the UK [Taken from p9]

Breakthrough 3

1. By directly supporting literacy skills and building confidence

- 13,000 people in the justice system will take part in our reading and writing programmes
- We will expand our work in Young Offender Institutions, to work with 1,600 young people in eight institutions

2. By helping partners increase the quality of literacy provision

- All our projects will work with partners – librarians, education departments, enrichment teams, and prison staff – increasing their knowledge of literacy issues and how to support people in the justice system

3. By working with communities

- By 2027, we will innovate and pilot through-the-gate offers to be delivered in the community, working with National Literacy Trust Hubs, probation, approved premises and partners offering support post-release

4. By influencing leadership and policy to create lasting change

- The National Literacy Trust will expand its research function around literacy in the justice sector and publish new evidence detailing effective practice and medium term impact based on an ever-growing evidence base. [Taken from p12]

The strategy also highlights some specific initiatives, for example:

"**Early Words Matter – the National Literacy Trust's headline early years campaign**.
Between 2023 and 2028, Early Words Matter will support the early language and literacy of 250,000 children in 20 communities. All National Literacy Trust local teams are working directly with the families who need the greatest help. They are supported by the Literacy and Business Council. Companies including Very and WHSmith are funding community action in locations close to their main offices. The Department for Education is enabling us to link the campaign into the Family Hub

network. And a partnership with BBC's Tiny Happy People campaign is enabling us to reach and empower parents with high quality information and resources." [p8][11]

This is an important next-stage for the NLT, with lots of opportunities for libraries – and our partners – to get involved. Recommended.[12]

Equality, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion – Other Agencies

Walking the walk? Managers, inclusivity and organisational success

This new report[13] from CMI makes some important points and comes up with strong recommendations.

In its early section, "Why this matters now", the report says:

> "There's a tendency to think that discussions about equality, diversity and inclusion are separate from discussions about performance, delivery and results. We think they belong in the same room […]
>
> But it's important to recognise that it's okay to have misgivings about 'EDI initiatives'. Because if, in reality, all an organisation is doing in its 'commitment to EDI' is ticking boxes or virtue-signalling, then it is perfectly legitimate to call them out. As this study indicates, plenty of employees do feel that their organisation is 'talking the talk' but not yet 'walking the walk'." [p7]

The key findings include:

> "A large proportion of HR leaders and employees say their organisation believes that a focus on EDI is important for success […]
>
> Yet half of HR leaders and a third of employees report having seen discrimination and / or micro aggressions in their workplace." [p8]

Also:

> "Inclusive practice seems to be more prevalent in firms whose HR leaders consider that the organisation is achieving its organisational objectives:" [p8]

The report finds:

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[11] See also: https://literacytrust.org.uk/policy-and-campaigns/early-words-matter/.

[12] Source: National Literacy Trust *Monthly Newsletter*, Apr 2024.

[13] *Walking the walk? Managers, inclusivity and organisational success.* CMI, 2024, https://www.managers.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Walking-The-Walk-Report.pdf.

"[…] a strong association between inclusive cultures and wellbeing at work" [p8]

For example:

- "Employees report significantly higher job satisfaction rates in workplaces where inclusion is deemed business-critical (79% vs 52%). [p9]

And:

"Having a supportive manager was the most influential factor in people feeling supported and included at work (60%) higher than workplace culture (53%), flexible working arrangements (47%) and diversity and inclusion initiatives (24%)." [p9]

The report also found that:

- "Management training appears to have a strong association with inclusivity" [p9]

- "There are practical actions that organisations / managers and leaders can take that appear to make a positive difference:
    - For HR decision-makers, this includes senior management diversity and having an inclusive strategy that includes formal management training.
    - For employees, the presence of feedback platforms like EDI committees and inclusion hubs appears effective in creating a positive, inclusive work environment." [p9]

The report's recommendations include (and there is a fuller list with more information within the report pp32-33):

"Recommendations for leadership teams

- Actively engage in and support your organisation's inclusion strategy, use data, model inclusive behaviour, provide manager training, communicate and act swiftly against discrimination

Recommendations for managers

- Push for formal management training. Embrace new perspectives by committing to ongoing learning and actively encouraging feedback, creating positive ripple effects across the organisation.

Policy recommendations

- The Government should commit to a UK-wide management development strategy, collaborating with devolved governments and consulting on incentives to improve management capability.
- The Government should build on Labour's Business Partnership for Growth to make sure public procurement is fair and transparent

> by pushing for greater EDI accountability including through public sector procurement requirements.
>
> - The Government should champion the role of trained managers and leaders in improving inclusivity and organisational outcomes and enhance public sector management, culture and training." [p10]

This is an interesting and important report (even if it does assume that equality/inclusion/diversity initiatives are led by HR!). The key messages – about engaging all staff at all levels with equality, diversity and inclusion work – are extremely timely and important.

Recommended.

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

"Sweden's libraries caught in a political row about drag story hour"

Opposition to Drag Queen Storytimes is spreading, according to this recent article[14]:

> "Drag story hour is 'nothing other than indoctrination and sexualisation of children', claimed Sweden Democrats politician Jonathan Sager during a session of the local parliament in Kalmar, southern Sweden, in 2022. He was reacting to plans to organise a drag story hour event at the local library, where drag queens would read to children, challenging norms of gender and sexuality. He called (unsuccessfully) for the event to be cancelled.
>
> For someone not familiar with recent political trends in Sweden, Sager's view may seem out of character for a country known for its tolerance and progressive approach towards sexual minorities. But just like other countries, Sweden is experiencing a backlash against drag story hour

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[14] Lisa Magdalena Engström, Fredrik Hanell <u>and</u> Hanna Carlsson "Sweden's libraries caught in a political row about drag story hour", *The Conversation*, 22 Oct 2024, https://theconversation.com/swedens-libraries-caught-in-a-political-row-about-drag-story-hour-241159?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Latest%20from%20The%20Conversation%20for%20October%2022%202024%20-%203138032007&utm_content=Latest%20from%20The%20Conversation%20for%20October%2022%202024%20-%203138032007+CID_1b5fea366efacb10c6723710b0ada86b&utm_source=campaign_monitor_uk&utm_term=Swedens%20libraries%20caught%20in%20a%20political%20row%20about%20drag%20story%20hour.

events. Public libraries have repeatedly been the target of hatred and threats from radical right actors, including politicians. Culture wars, often associated with the polarised political climate of the US, have now firmly taken root in Scandinavia."

Abbreviations and acronyms

CMI = Chartered Management Institute
EDI = equality, equity, diversity and inclusion
HR = human resources
NLT = National Literacy Trust

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