

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 ...?

Books for Keeps

The March issue¹ includes:

- Alex Falase Koya and Caroline Nolan “Better support for authors in public libraries”, in which they introduce the GLL Literary Foundation which “[...] offers up to 20 author bursary placements, alongside a number of additional author support placements, in areas where GLL operates public libraries under its ‘Better’ brand: Bromley, Greenwich, Wandsworth, Dudley and Lincolnshire.” [pp4-5]
- The Bear “Trump and the Book Ban Deniers” [pp12-13], which is a short, insightful look at banning books – and the attempts being made to present this as otherwise:

“What is particularly revealing is that the same people who insist these books aren’t banned are often the ones loudly proclaiming that their own ‘freedom of speech’ is under attack. They scream censorship when social media platforms enforce content moderation but will happily endorse the state’s removal of books from schools. They rage against the ‘tyranny’ of fact-checkers but have no issue with government-mandated book removals.

It’s a remarkable double standard – one that only makes sense when you realise that, for these people, ‘freedom’ isn’t a universal principle but a selective privilege. They don’t want free speech; they want speech that aligns with their own worldview to be dominant and uncontested.” [p12]

- Darren Chetty and Karen Sands-O’Connor “Beyond the Secret Garden: Growing up away from Birth Parents, Part two – books published in the 21st century”, which continues their look at “the representations of lone children of colour” [p18-19]
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¹ *Books for Keeps*, 271, Mar 2025, <https://booksforkeeps.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/BfK-271-March-2025.pdf>.

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

“Reflections on Contending Queer Joy and Censorship in LGBTQ+ History Month”

This is a terrific post² on the CILIPS blog by Leah Higgins (CILIPS Digital Assistant). She starts by putting LGBTQ+ History Month in its current context:

It’s a funny thing, the questions fighting each other in my brain as I write this. LGBTQ+ history is history worth celebrating, and it deserves to have its own spotlight, celebrated in the month of February. We should pedestal queer joy, creativity, freedom of expression and self identity.

But – not for the first time in history – how can we focus on this when LGBTQ+ stories are being censored and stripped from library shelves?”

This is followed by a brief look at some of the political actions being taken in the US Department of Defense Education Activity (a federal school system):

- “Entire school libraries have been temporarily closed while books are removed and reviewed for compliance
- Books about immigration, LGBTQ+ identities, and racial justice have been marked for removal
- Educators have been told to remove books from their personal classroom collections if they reference gender identity, race, or ‘discriminatory equity ideology,’ without clear guidelines on what constitutes a violation”

some of which have already been focused on by PEN America (Leah cites an important *Guardian* article³):

“As the world watches book banning at a scale probably no one has witnessed in our lifetime, libraries and their staff are the ones on the frontline.”

She concludes with a powerful image of what a library can offer:

“We know the library is a quiet space, and a safe space, where other places in the school might be sensory overload or hallways may be truncated with people you’d rather avoid. But it doesn’t stop there.

² Leah Higgins “Reflections on Contending Queer Joy and Censorship in LGBTQ+ History Month”, CILIPS, 2025, https://www.cilips.org.uk/reflections-on-lgbtq-history/?utm_campaign=1934650_March%20Newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_source=The%20Chartered%20Institute%20of%20Library%20and%20%20Information%20Professionals&dm_i=6WFS,15GSA,9VBO9,4MWCS,1.

³ Marina Dunbar “Multi-level barrage of US book bans is ‘unprecedented’, says PEN America”, *The Guardian*, 7 Feb 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/feb/07/book-bans-pen-america-censorship>.

Inspired by the photographs of book displays in photos submitted to us by school librarians, and in particular an LGBTQ+ pride display, I realised that **the library is a place for its users to be celebrated. To a person who may never feel accepted or normal outside of those walls, this cannot be underestimated.**” [emphasis hers]

and a brief summary of ways that we can all become allies.

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

“ALA statement on White House assault on the Institute of Museum and Library Services”

Issued on 15 Mar 2025, this is a powerful Statement⁴ from the ALA:

“An executive order issued by the Trump administration on Friday night, March 14, calls for the elimination of the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the nation’s only federal agency for America’s libraries. The following statement was made by the American Library Association:

Americans have loved and relied on public, school and academic libraries for generations. By eliminating the only federal agency dedicated to funding library services, the Trump administration’s executive order is cutting off at the knees the most beloved and trusted of American institutions and the staff and services they offer [...]

To dismiss some 75 committed workers and mission of an agency that advances opportunity and learning is to dismiss the aspirations and everyday needs of millions of Americans. And those who will feel that loss most keenly live in rural communities.”

“National Archives Head Resigns as Trump Takes Control of Records”

Recently published⁵:

“The acting head of the National Archives announced his resignation on Friday, paving the way for Donald Trump to continue his takeover of the government’s records and the agency that serves as custodian of the nation’s history.

⁴ “ALA statement on White House assault on the Institute of Museum and Library Services”, ALA, 15 Mar 2025, <https://www.ala.org/news/2025/03/ala-statement-white-house-assault-institute-museum-and-library-services>.

⁵ Dan Friedman and David Corn “National Archives Head Resigns as Trump Takes Control of Records”, *Mother Jones*, 14 Feb 2025, <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2025/02/national-archives-head-resigns-as-trump-takes-control-of-records/>.

Deputy Archivist William Bosanko informed staff in an email Friday that he will step down on Tuesday. Bosanko, who has worked at the agency since 1993, has been the acting head of the National Archives and Records Administration for just a week, after Trump fired Archivist of the United States Colleen Shogan.

Under federal law, a president can fire the archivist but must also ‘communicate the reasons for any such removal to each House of the Congress.’ Trump did not do that. Over a week ago, the Trump White House moved to make Secretary of State Marco Rubio the acting archivist, despite standing law that the deputy archivist assumes those responsibilities if the position is vacant.

Bosanko’s exit is part of a Trump putsch at the agency, which was deeply involved in the case of the top-secret documents Trump removed from the White House when he left office in 2021.”

“Contested heritage” and “Culture wars”

“Pentagon schools suspend library books for ‘compliance review’ under Trump orders”

According to this recent article⁶ in *The Guardian*:

“Tens of thousands of American children studying in Pentagon schools serving US military families have had all access to library books suspended for a week while officials conduct a ‘compliance review’ under Donald Trump’s crackdown on DEI and gender equality.

The Department of Defense circulated a memo to parents on Monday that said that it was examining library books ‘potentially related to gender ideology or discriminatory equity ideology topics’. The memo, which has been obtained by the Guardian, said that a ‘small number of items’ had been identified and were being kept for ‘further review’.

Books deemed to be in possible violation of the president’s executive orders targeting transgender people and so-called ‘radical indoctrination’ of schoolchildren have been removed from library shelves. The memo states that the titles have been relocated ‘to the professional collection for evaluation with access limited to professional staff’.

Broader issues – Government, Government Agencies and Local Government

Joint Cultural Needs Assessment: guidelines for delivery

This second edition of the JCNA⁷ has been published recently⁸.

⁶ Ed Pilkington “Pentagon schools suspend library books for ‘compliance review’ under Trump orders”, *The Guardian*, 13 Feb 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/feb/13/pentagon-schools-closed-libraries-trump>.

It builds on the previous version, published in 2020, and has been influenced by the following developments:

- “Responses to the impact of COVID-19 on the culture and hospitality sectors and on the lives and wellbeing of us all.
- The increase in the number of local authorities in England who are developing or now have long-term cultural strategies in place [...]
- The spread and success of the Arts Council England (ACE) Creative People and Places Project (CPP). Place-Based Peer Learning Programme and Cultural Compacts which now have an extensive knowledge base and experience in delivering place-based benefits that are both cultural and non-cultural [...]
- The widening of access to arts and culture in areas of historically low levels of cultural engagement through DCMS/ACE’s Cultural Development Fund and associated Learning Network.
- The impact of the ACE 2020-2030 Let’s Create Strategy with its three key objectives:
 - Every person can develop and express creativity throughout their lives.
 - A collaborative approach to culture helps villages, towns and cities across the country to thrive.
 - England’s cultural sector is innovative, collaborative and international.
- New Local Authority networks established by the Local Government Association (LGA) and the Chief Cultural and Leisure Officers Association, and resources that support knowledge exchange and practice to enable culture-led place partnerships:
 - The National Alliance for Local Government Cultural Services
 - The LGA’s Cultural Strategy in a Box which brings together advice and support to enable the design and delivery of effective cultural strategies
 - The recommendations of the National Commission for Culture & Local Government Cornerstones of Culture
- An increased national awareness of the importance of culture and heritage as enablers of improving communities, rebalancing investment, civic pride, economic opportunity and wellbeing [...]

⁷ *Joint Cultural Needs Assessment: guidelines for delivery*. ACE/LGA/University of Warwick, no date [?2024], https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/2025-02/UoW%20JCNA%20Guidelines.pdf?_cldee=HD-Vu3MYUJItMGagQvQKrTzIEAyrX9rYjOKMLOIx3FN754zyb7qWVlkzGuLMOXhQ&recipeid=contact-a4733678e9aee511937a005056915655-d6f727b3665243c6b9b985a827f4499a&esid=ec0514e2-ebde-ef11-a730-7c1e52666418.

⁸ I do wish organisations – especially one as key as ACE – would include clear publication details!

- New developments in the evaluation of culture-led placemaking from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and the Centre for Cultural Value as well as pioneering new methods for capturing data through creative and citizen-led approaches.
- The new version of the JCNA supports the government’s emphasis on community-led and devolved decision making leading to greater access and inclusion for all in our cultural and creative lives. This aspiration begins with places, their uniqueness and their ambitions for culture-led change.” [p7]

It leads towards drafting a local JCNA Plan which, in essence, involves:

- “Partnership working and collaboration are core to the delivery of cultural outcomes that also impact on a wide range of local needs; social, economic, education, justice, health, wellbeing and others.
- The cultural and creative industries and businesses in local areas provide an opportunity for growth, alongside the wider industrial ecology located in a place.
- Arts and cultural activity should be driven by locally agreed outcomes that add social as well as cultural value to a place and its communities.
- The JCNA process is designed to give local communities the opportunity to give voice to their own cultural aspirations and needs in dialogue with cultural organisations and providers.
- Local knowledge and lived experiences should be supported by a careful analysis of relevant data and other local sources of cultural and non-cultural evidence.
- To be resource-effective, there needs to be an agreed and measurable plan of how arts and culture resources, activities and outputs will deliver cultural and non-cultural place-based outcomes [...]” [p11]

Broader issues – Other Agencies

“Totalitarian Democracy: How Populist Leaders Are Undermining Democracy”

This interesting article⁹ has just been published by *Social Europe*; it explores some important ideas which are well worth thinking about for those of us working in the public sector:

⁹ Bo Rothstein “Totalitarian Democracy: How Populist Leaders Are Undermining Democracy”, *Social Europe*, 13 Feb 2025, <https://www.socialeurope.eu/totalitarian-democracy-how-populist-leaders-are-undermining-democracy>.

“The rise of Donald Trump and a wave of similarly inclined political populists worldwide raises the question of whether the traditional dichotomy between democratic and totalitarian regimes still holds. Trump and his counterparts represent, as I see it, a new ideological model best described as totalitarian democracy. Unlike outright authoritarianism, this model does not completely eliminate representative democracy, but it fundamentally reinterprets the meaning of an electoral mandate. It asserts that winning a majority of votes grants the elected leadership an unchecked right to impose its will across all areas of public life, with little regard for constitutional limits or long-established norms of democratic governance. The notion of fair play in politics—once a guiding principle in many democracies—is disregarded in favour of an aggressive majoritarianism.”

Abbreviations and acronyms

ACE = Arts Council England

ALA = American Library Association

CILIPS = Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals Scotland

DCMS = Department for Culture, Media and Sport

DEI = Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

GOP = the Republican Party, also known as the Grand Old Party (GOP)

JCNA = Joint Cultural Needs Assessment

LGA = Local Government Association

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