

Access to Books and Reading Projects for Young People in Public Care: The Librarians' Training Kit – Final Report

Aims and objectives of the project

The aim of the project was:

- To enable library staff to appreciate the specific needs of looked-after children and to make and sustain the necessary contacts to deliver effective services to them.

Within this, the specific objectives were:

- To increase library staff awareness of the issues involved in working with looked-after children;
- To equip library staff with the skills to develop sustainable partnerships to support working with looked-after children;
- To enable library staff to develop outreach and other ways of working outside the library buildings;
- To equip some library staff to 'cascade' this training to their colleagues.

How the project was delivered, and by whom

The project commenced in June 2002, and the major part of the work was carried out by John Vincent, the Networker for "The Network – tackling social exclusion in libraries, museums, archives and galleries".

From June 2002 onwards, I made contact with library authorities that had expressed an interest in this area of work (initial contact was via The Network and via ASCEL¹). Although the original intention had been to work with four or five partners, it quickly became clear that there was considerable interest in working with looked-after children, and some 40 authorities came forward to become partners in the project.

Having tested the survey with one partner (Enfield), I then surveyed all partners, and, from this, ascertained what the key training needs were:

- Why children are in care/facts and figures
- Reading needs
- Building and sustaining partnerships
- Working through outreach

¹ The Association of School, Children's and Education Librarians.

- Library and information needs of carers.

From these “blocks”, I put together a course which was piloted in London in May 2003. From the feedback received, it was clear that this was the sort of course required, and so, from September-November 2003, the course was run in:

- York
- Windsor
- Chorley
- Westbury
- Newcastle
- Cambridgeshire
- Leicester
- Cornwall (in-house course, to test how well it fitted in with an overview of tackling social exclusion).

Each of these pilot courses (with the exception of that in Cornwall) was organised with the local Regional Agency and ASCEL, both of whom assisted with publicity and finding appropriate venues.

Each course was slightly different in order to test as much material as possible.

Each course also had a case study presentation from a local library service, wherever possible show-casing “Right to Read” projects:

- London – Grace McElwee and Laura Andreas (Croydon)
- York – Alison Jones and Nicky Copley
- Windsor – Sue Hyland and Judy Ottaway (Buckinghamshire)
- Chorley – Jean Wolstenholme and Paul Robinson (Lancashire)
- Newcastle – Kathryn Armstrong and Michael Bettencourt (South Tyneside)
- Cambridgeshire – Richard Young and the Education Support Team
- Leicester – Andy Cooke and Karen Green (Leicestershire)

I led each of the courses, and, for two of them, worked with Anne Harding, an independent lecturer and trainer, and expert on children’s reading needs. On one pilot, Christine Blowman, the former project worker on “Caring with Books”, led a workshop; and, on another, Helen Johnson from the Refugee Council highlighted the needs of unaccompanied minors.

From the results of the pilot courses and discussion with partners, key elements were identified, and these formed both the basis of the webpage

(www.seapn.org.uk/phf) and the pack which was distributed in draft form at the Conference [see below].

Kathryn Armstrong, Michael Bettencourt and I also took part in the PHF day course for potential bidders in February 2004, focusing on the work of the project and the South Tyneside work.

The Conference

To bring the project to conclusion, a Conference was organised in Birmingham on 26 April 2004 (Birmingham was chosen partly because of transport links, but primarily as a way of involving the last of the English Regions).

The programme included presentations from:

- John Vincent about the project
- Becky Benwell (DfES) on the Government's future directions for services for looked-after children
- Pam Parish (Shropshire), on of those involved in "Caring with Books", on what happens when major funding ceases
- Rachel Hockey (Manchester) on mainstreaming work with looked-after children
- Anne Harding on the reading needs of looked-after children
- Susan Blishen (PHF) on the development of and future plans for "Right to Read"
- Viv Griffiths on evaluating "Right to Read" projects and the future.

There were also workshops led by:

- Kathryn Armstrong and Michael Bettencourt
- Alison Jones and Nicky Copley
- Grace McElwee
- Jean Wolstenholme and Paul Robinson.

Whom did the project benefit, and how many?

Some 150 library staff attended the pilot courses. In addition, I wrote up course notes from each one, and these were circulated, so more people in each of the participating library authorities will ultimately have benefited.

The Conference was attended by 60 people.

How other interested parties have been or will be informed of the outcome

This has been a highly participative project from the start. This has involved:

- Pooling good practice and information at the pilot training courses (and sharing these via the course notes);
- Disseminating information via the 9 English Regional Agencies, ASCEL and CILIP's Youth Libraries Group;
- Establishing email contact, not only with the partner authorities, but also more widely. This has allowed for dissemination of information, plus receiving and responding to enquiries;
- Establishing a JISCMail email list² (from May 2004 onwards);
- Setting up a regularly-updated page with information and training materials on The Network's website (www.seapn.org.uk/phf);
- Disseminating information via the National Literacy Trust's website for PHF;
- Production of a pack which was piloted at the Conference and, following helpful feedback, is now being produced in its final form;
- Involvement in the PHF training day in February 2004;
- Developing contact with a range of other agencies involved in this area of work, including the Who Cares? Trust, ContinYou, the National Literacy Trust, and DfES.

I also attended a one-day conference³ at the National Gallery, where their work with looked-after young people was showcased, and took the opportunity to talk to a number of people about this project, and to make some new contacts.

Later in June 2004, Susan Blishen and I are meeting Becky Benwell (DfES) to discuss ways in which PHF's and public libraries' role in working with looked-after children can be more widely developed.

What problems did you encounter in doing it?

In the funding bid, I identified three likely problems:

- The reluctance of many library staff to work outside their traditional role, especially with a client group that may be seen as 'challenging' or 'difficult';
- The lack of time to allow staff to become really familiar with this area of work;

² This was requested at the Conference, and is at www.jiscmail.ac.uk/lists/LAC.html.

³ "Line of Vision", March 2004.

- The lack of money to pay for training (apart from that related to the People's Network).

From those who attended the pilot courses and the Conference, it was clear that, whilst there may be some reluctance amongst some staff, there is also enormous enthusiasm and willingness to get involved in this area of work. There was a perception amongst people on one of the pilot courses that looked-after young people were “challenging”, but, elsewhere, this was countered, especially from those who had had first-hand experience.

Lack of time was a problem, primarily as:

- The pilot courses which were intended to run through the summer of 2003 had to be reorganised for the autumn, because key staff were unavailable (mostly engaged in the Summer Reading Challenge);
- Some library authorities recognised that they would make only very limited progress in working with looked-after children, as they did not have staff that they could commit;
- Some library authorities were extremely slow in responding (eg to the initial survey), which they put down to lack of time;
- Some authorities found it difficult to nominate staff to the pilot courses and the Conference.

Many library services had found ingenious ways of funding training, and the lack of training budgets was not a major issue (also, the pilot courses were very low-cost).

For whatever reason, some library services had also found it difficult to develop and maintain contacts with other agencies (especially Social Services), although these were in contrast to South Tyneside, Norfolk and Cambridgeshire, for example, where partnership working was very strong.

Although an original intention of the project had been to engage with a number of “champions” across the country, who would ‘cascade’ the training, this has not happened – apart from a couple of people, participants in the pilot courses did not feel that they had the necessary expertise to do this.

Finally, there also seemed to be a reluctance on the part of a couple of library services which had highly-developed services for looked-after children to get involved in this project – perhaps they thought that they did not require training.

How you know whether or not the project has succeeded

There have been five main pieces of evidence to show that the project has been successful:

- Feedback from the pilot courses
- Feedback – in terms of comments – from the Conference
- The insistence by one Region that it had a pilot course when that had not been the original intention!
- Growth in the number of enquiries received by The Network about working with looked-after children
- Feedback from users of The Network's website.

Once the final version of the pack has been distributed, it is hoped that there will be further feedback from that.

Other funders approached

None.

Funding beyond the period of the grant – sustainability

The key ways forward will be:

- Maintenance of The Network's webpage and JISCMail list – both of these will be funded by The Network, assisted by –
- Income generated from other training in this field. For example, I have recently run a course for Oxfordshire's "Reach Up" Team, and will be taking part in developing a programme for Cheshire.

What still needs to be done?

Following the completion of this project, there remains the following:

- Further in-depth training of staff who attended the pilot courses;
- Introductory training in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland;
- Meeting with DfES to discuss the role of public libraries and PHF;
- Production and distribution of final version of pack.

Conclusions

This was a highly successful project, primarily because of the strength of the partnerships created (building on The Network's growing reputation as a training agency), and the engagement of all those who took part.

Through the use of the training materials (eg how to build and sustain partnerships; an outreach exercise), library staff have developed awareness of these ways of working, and have also gained insights into what makes for good practice from the case studies.

I am particularly indebted to the Paul Hamlyn Foundation for agreeing to fund this project and to Susan Blishen for being so supportive and flexible (especially when it became clear that the original timescale would need to be altered).

I want to thank:

- The partner authorities, and especially all those who completed the initial survey;
- The people who attended the pilot courses and helped shape the project;
- All those who emailed information to me;
- The speakers, workshop leaders and case studies, both for the pilot courses and the Conference;
- CILIP for updating The Network website.

John Vincent
June 2004