

Public libraries' support for job-seekers

As the [effects of cuts in public service start to really bite](#), it is ironic that one particular target, the public library service, is also a key resource for communities hit by unemployment and poverty.

In England and Wales, the Society of Chief Librarians and partners (including Arts Council England and The Reading Agency) are rolling out four Universal Offers, including a Universal Health Offer (the public library contribution to the health and well-being of local communities); a Universal Information Offer (to develop the role of public libraries in helping citizens access information online in a digital age); a Universal Reading Offer; and a Universal Digital Offer. These Offers will highlight and support even further work with people and communities affected by unemployment.

In this brief article, John Vincent outlines some of the work being undertaken in public libraries today.

Day-to-day support

Libraries are assisting users with queries relating to logging on and using the new Job Centre Plus website, needed for benefits checking and job searches, and are assisting people to claim Universal Credit and other benefits online.

Targeted information

- Specific webpages, eg Doncaster Libraries' [Jobseekers' Information](#); Enfield Libraries' [Resources for Jobseekers](#); Kensington & Chelsea Libraries' [What can the library offer you if you're a Job Seeker?](#); Kent Libraries' [Jobseekers](#)

Running specific programmes

- City of London Libraries:

Earlier this year, the [City Business Library](#) (CBL) ran a series of employment programmes for unemployed graduates from the City and East London, November 2012 to March 2013.

There were 6 groups, each consisting of 5 sessions (3 hours per week for 5 consecutive weeks), covering different topics tailored to graduates looking for employment: 1) Employability – what employers are looking for; 2) CVs – including a follow up 121 session with each delegate; 3) Using CBL's specialist resources to identify potential employers; 4) Presenting yourself at an interview; 5) Giving a presentation at an interview and interview practice.

The middle session was run by a CBL Business Librarian and the other four sessions were run by external specialist consultants. The funding for these programmes came from the Jobcentre Plus (East London

District) as a result of a successful bid by CBL. Each group had 8 delegates, a total of 48 unemployed graduates.

CBL also helps job-seekers on a daily basis using the Library's specialist subscription resources, including contact information on all registered companies in the world, from which customers can search by location/industry/growth/etc to identify potential employers. CBL also has financial and profile information on companies and a vast amount of market research available. All the Business Librarians on duty are expert in the use of the available resources and are always on hand to help. We also have links to relevant job websites and books on writing CVs, interview techniques, etc.

As well as the resources in the Library, CBL hosts a wide range of seminars and 121 clinics. The 121 advice clinics cost £10 per session but all group seminars are currently free of charge. There are about 50 seminars/clinics each month. The full details can be found on the [Events](#) link on our [web page](#).

From April 2012 to March 2013 we had just over 400 unemployed people attend our seminars/clinics (in addition to the 48 delegates of the employment programme).

CBL has close links with the City of London's Economic Development Office, working together on projects such as with CityStep, an organisation aimed at helping City residents find employment.

Hosting job groups/work-clubs

- Devon Libraries organise [Work Clubs](#), "a new service aimed at helping people get back into work, and supporting those looking for their first job. The two-hour sessions, often run in partnership with other agencies, include advice on CV writing, interview techniques, volunteering opportunities and assistance with online application forms, as well as providing computer access in order to search for vacancies and improve your basic IT skills. They also give job hunters the chance to meet others looking for work, build new contacts and share experiences."
- In Gloucestershire, Lydney, Cinderford and Coleford Libraries all run job clubs for 16-19 year olds on a weekly basis. These are two-hour sessions run over the lunchtime period. There is growing evidence of the impact of this work: for example, by March 2013:
 - Lydney: out of 40 young people attending, 34 moved on to either a job, training or college.
 - Cinderford: out of 35 young people attending, 20 moved on to either a job, training or college.
 - Coleford: out of 25 young people attending, 16 moved on to either a job, training or college.

In addition, Newent Library is hosting bi-monthly sessions run by the National Careers Advisory Service; these are either full day or half day sessions depending on demand and are available to anyone of working age.

- [Kent Libraries, Registration and Archives:](#)

“Some of our libraries also host Work Clubs, places where jobseekers get a chance to meet others looking for work, build new contacts, share job hunting experiences and get help with interview techniques, CVs and learn about volunteering opportunities.

In addition our Work Clubs offer

- free printing and photocopying (up to 10 black and white printouts/ copies per session) and stationery to help you apply for jobs
- free computer access to help with searching and applying for jobs online
- free welcome pack (while stocks last) including information and a memory stick to save your job search documents.”

- Poole Libraries run a [Jobs Hub](#) at their Rossmore Library where “you can get free help with job searching, CV writing, interview skills, application forms. Daily jobs board.”

- Southend-on-Sea Libraries are working with [SeeJobGroup](#), a Community Job Group at Central Library:

“Our job group is a 12 week plan called SeeChange, this consists of group workshops and individual coaching sessions. Each jobgroup works with between 18-25 people. Our job groups are free to join and free to attend.”

Working with work-based learning providers

- Kent Libraries, Registration and Archives are working with [Key Training Services](#) (the work-based learning provider for Medway and Kent). Key organise a regular “Welcome Week” when learners from across Kent will independently come into libraries and carry out activities to support their study. These activities include:
 - Mapping the layout of the library
 - Looking at the library’s position in the community and how it relates to other municipal services
 - Using online information for study support
 - Looking at their volunteering and work clubs information.

The aim is for learners to gain confidence in accessing the free library services to enable them to develop skills and go on to gain employment and/or education.

Providing work experience

- North Somerset Libraries have been approached by the Job Centre who were keen to place job-seekers into some voluntary work-experience roles. The Job Centre wanted to place people on an eight week programme of between 16-32 hours per week. Having discussed this with our library Supervisors we decided to offer roles as ICT volunteers/Digital Champions for 16 hours per week.

IT skills

- Devon Libraries offer [Free Fridays](#) – “a new service in libraries offering free extended computer and Internet access every Friday, with extra support from trained library staff.”
- Poole Libraries organises [Computer Buddy drop-in sessions](#): “If you just want drop in to talk to someone about your computer problems or need guidance how to learn on your own, we now have Computer Buddy Drop-in sessions at all of our libraries. This is ideal for you if you are just starting out using a computer, but need a bit of help.” Also computer taster sessions.

Notes

Work-based learning providers: “Work-Based Learning supports young people in getting the right skills to move successfully into the world of work. If you have completed compulsory education and you don’t want to move into 6th form or college, you don’t yet have the qualifications to get a full apprenticeship or have missed the deadline to apply, Work-Based Learning could be for you!” (Wintle, no date)

References

Davies, Steve. *The public library service under attack: how cuts are putting individuals and communities at risk and damaging local businesses and economies*. UNISON, 2013,

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