

“Right to Read” Tips no.2 – Working with Foster Carers

In June 2006, we circulated a request for ideas for innovative ways of engaging them with libraries and reading. A number of library services replied, and this is a summary of their responses:

Blackburn with Darwen

We tried a number of approaches here in Blackburn, and the Library & Information Service has worked with the Equal Chances team for a number of years.

In the past projects have included:

- Roadshows – day-long events featuring guest speakers
- Coffee mornings with book and board game gifting at libraries
- Library-based "Fun Days" with lead-in workshops to facilitate the planning with the design of publicity materials.

For the last few years a reading game (Professor Nabroc) has been offered culminating in a library-based presentation. This year the approach has been to ask the foster carers to "sign on" for this, and this seems to have resulted in a higher level of commitment. We are now going to offer the Reading Mission to this group and will invite all carers to a library-based session for parents and carers.

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Dorset

Dorset County Council has been running a Paul Hamlyn funded “Right to Read” project for the past three years, with one year to go. As Dorset is so rural we initially ran home visits with our Reader in Residence visiting the carers’ own homes. This was focussed on the children rather than the carers. Each carer had two visits at home, which was to be followed up by a third meeting which would be in the library. However, practically none of them took us up on the library visit. At the end of the first two years, the evaluation showed that the children reached had really benefited and had started to read more. However, the carers viewed the project as something for the children and hadn't really become involved in it, or rather the ones that had were the carers that already read a lot and used their library.

With this in mind we moved onto the next stage of the project and have moved the focus to the carers. We have organised events in the libraries, reading groups for carers, and informal coffee mornings to find out about encouraging reading in the home, but the uptake has always been really low with the regular response being that carers are too busy. The only events that proved really popular were the ones with Jacqueline Wilson and Lemn Sissay, but we don't have the money to regularly organise events of that scale. The home visits continue to prove really popular.

Now that we're in our final year of funding we're look at sustainability. We're unable to continue with the home visits but are looking of ways of ensuring

that all carers have easy access to advice on reading. We're doing this by working with the Fostering team and including "Right to Read" in the Fostering Services Induction process. We have put together two information booklets and these will be given to all carers when they are registered. Questions about reading are going to be included in the interview process. We've also introduced a foster carers card which has a slightly longer borrowing period and exempts the carer from all charges (except for audio/visual items). Carers can join and receive one of these cards at their induction, or they can get one from their library by showing their Carer's registration card. Carers that are already registered will be reached through their annual review.

The information booklets will also be made available to social workers, schools and library staff to ensure an ongoing awareness of the project.

I hope this proves helpful. It's not a complete success story but it has had an impact. I'd be really interested in hearing what other authorities, particularly rural ones, have been doing. It'd be good to find out if someone has managed to tap into the magic formula that makes carers want to leave their house!
Contact: Josie Hickin, j.m.hickin@dorsetcc.gov.uk

East Sussex

In East Sussex we have recently completed a Paul Hamlyn Right to Read project where we made 2 home visits to looked after children of 7-13 years old and carers. The visits included surveying reading habits of both child and carer, and asking children to choose materials they liked. Each child was sent 2 sets of materials. These were primarily for informal home literacy, so included electronic games, joke books, craft sets with instructions, CDs and tapes, as well as traditional books: all involved reading. The second set of materials usually included a book token (for children and for carers) so that children could make more independent choices of materials for themselves. We are now aiming to keep the project going using volunteer visitors. The project was successful on various indicators, and we felt that factors that were particularly helpful were: the individual visit to the child, asking for and developing children's opinions about what they enjoyed, involving the carer, and the child having a personally-addressed set of materials in the post.
Contact: Nicola Yuill, nicolay@sussex.ac.uk

Lancashire

Here in Lancashire we have extended the "NE14 Reading" scheme to foster careers with a scene called "Care2Read". We have developed a list for younger children as well as using the existing list for older children. We are working in partnership with the Family Placement Team and attend their monthly meetings with foster carers to discuss books and what libraries can offer, I also do a story time session for any children that attend the meetings with their carers. At the moment 2 of the areas have been given both sets of books and the other 3 areas of Lancashire are very interested in taking part and it is just a matter of finding the funding for the extra books.
Contact: paul.robinson@lcl.lancscc.gov.uk

Leicestershire

Three things from Leicestershire:

- We have a good slot in foster carer training/induction, around the importance of reading for pleasure
- Work with the County's adult learning staff to deliver family learning sessions in libraries
- All events (eg book based craft activities) for looked-after children encourage the foster carers to stay with the kids ... lots of chat and coffee with other carers seems quite popular

Contact: ACooke@leics.gov.uk

Redbridge

We have a foster carers ticket which gives them special borrowing privileges and a leaflet outline the services available ...

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Stockport

Here in Stockport, we have just started to concentrate on working with foster children and their carers. We are working with the study support co-ordinator responsible for foster children. Via her links with foster carers, we have attended a meeting and explained what the library service can offer. Currently we are posting out fliers and accompanying letters for the children and carers, inviting them to their local library, and again publicising all the services we have. This time it is aimed at children leaving primary school in a few weeks, but we hope to do similar promotions for different age groups in the future.

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Torbay

Here in Torbay, most of our looked-after children and young people are cared for by foster carers. We have a steering group within in the council (led by social services) to look at increasing leisure opportunities for looked-after children and young people. Reps from libraries, arts, sport, youth service etc meet twice a year. All foster carers have a folder with leaflets etc on leisure opportunities in Torbay, which is updated usually before each school holiday. Library services send their holiday activity publicity to the social worker and she includes this info in the updates. It's an easy way to reach the target group. Also, through involvement with this group, we negotiated concessions etc, easier joining procedures for looked-after children and young people/foster carers (eg Social Services agreed to cover the costs of any lost or damaged books rather than the financial burden falling on the foster carer).

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