Library services for older people – good practice guide

Foreword

The Society of Chief Librarians is really pleased to see the publication of this good practice guide. Older people are a key client group for all library and information services and will become a growing priority in the short, medium and long terms.

This is a really helpful guide. It provides links to a huge range of relevant information sources, data and facts about older people. It has an excellent section on how to develop library and information services strategies for older people – which means we don't have to start at the very beginning. It also includes a useful checklist.

One of the most telling concepts in the guide (and an obvious one when you think about it) is that we are all 'apprentice older people'. This adds greater urgency to the process of creating a new strategic framework – and this is the guide to help us do that.

Tony Durcan
President, Society of Chief Librarians

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Why should libraries work with older people?

This is an opportunity for libraries to be at the forefront of work with the largest growing section of the population: the group that will dominate policy provision in the coming years.

The latest population estimates[1] (for 2005) show:

• **20.3 million people are over 50, up 490,000 since 2002**
• **11.2 million are over state pension age[2]**
• **2.6 million are aged over 80**
• **In 2008 a quarter more people will turn 60 than just four years ago and people will live longer.**

The 'baby-boomers' are now set to enter older age en masse and libraries will need to appeal to this high-expectation group to retain existing members and attract new ones.

Older people need to be treated as individuals and Age Concern has noted that the older population is becoming more diverse. It has also emphasised the increasing social isolation and depression[3] that many people face as they grow older. These are areas where many libraries already have a good track record in terms of their work on social inclusion and meeting the needs of people who are socially isolated – for example, by providing stimulating activities which bring health benefits. In addition, one of the great strengths of public libraries is that people visit them of their own volition.

Being at the forefront of such work gives libraries an opportunity to promote themselves and their work across local authorities, to other agencies and to the general public.

It is clear that libraries have a role in supporting the ability of older people to live independently and remain actively engaged in the world of learning and the wider community. Older people's needs are often complex and require a holistic approach to make a positive difference. Collaborating with other organisations, including health care and older people's agencies, extends the reach of the library and enhances the quality of older people's lives.

Libraries have a strong role to play in supporting the wellbeing agenda, particularly in terms of:

• **stimulation**
• **bringing older people together**
• **reducing isolation**
• **socialisation.**

They also provide information that supports major life events and issues, such as:

• **leaving work**
• **bereavement**
• **health**
• **active ageing**
• **learning**
• **safety**
• **transport and mobility**
• **housing**
• **finance/benefits**
• **leisure.**

[1] Figures courtesy of The Age Agenda 2008: public policy and older people. Age Concern, 2008 (further details from: **http://www.ageconcern.org.uk/bookshop/index.cfm?fuseaction=product&product=F39676D6-E7FB-1C5F-EA1222E5FE446274)**.
[2] By mid-2007, "For the first time ever, there are more people of state pensionable age than under-16s", Office for National Statistics News Release, 21 August 2008, **http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/popest0808.pdf**.
[3] Undiagnosed, untreated, at risk: the experiences of older people with depression. Age Concern, 2008. **http://www.ageconcern.org.uk/AgeConcern/Documents/PA0130708_depression_campaign_report.pdf**.

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United Nations Principles for Older Persons

These five key principles provide a framework for identifying the needs of older people in the community generally and also as library users:

- **independence**
  information and communications technology (ICT) training; book delivery services; access to relevant community information; formats and facilities that allow independence, such as large print / audio books; wheelchair/walking frame-friendly aisles; access for scooters

- **participation**
  focus groups; input into library planning; participation in local government; volunteering; oral histories; friends of libraries; family history; local studies and friendship groups

- **care**
  needs of older people a priority in planning; information on legal issues in plain English; health information that is up-to-date and easy to understand

- **self-fulfilment**
  more mobile library services for people who are home-bound; large print; audio books; programmes; older workers on the staff

- **dignity**
  equal employment opportunity; appropriately trained staff; access to services; adaptive technologies[5].

Why have a good practice guide?

Many libraries and library staff aim to do successful work with older people and offer creative and responsive services but want a guide to:
- **give them ideas**
- **help them consider the range of core, universal services they need to provide**
- **consider possible constructive and creative partnerships, both within local authorities and externally**
- **help them make a case for budgets to develop their services for older people**
- **give support and guidance on how to plan and carry out initiatives, especially by highlighting examples from other libraries.**

The commonality of library work and services means there is an excellent environment for the transfer and growth of successful ideas and practice from one library service to others.

In addition, older people can be pivotal in libraries. As individuals they can be ambassadors for the library service to the many groups and communities in which they participate. As grandparents they can be the key to reaching children.

The changing perspectives of older people will become increasingly important and libraries need to be ready to reassess whether their services are still relevant or whether new ones are required.

Libraries are increasingly required to demonstrate the impact that their services have and their work is coming under increased scrutiny.

If you have comments on this guide and/or are interested in joining a network developing library provision for older people, please contact John Vincent, **john@nadder.org.uk**.

[4.]The Principles in full are available at: **http://www.un.org/NewLinks/older/99/principles.htm**

[5.]Taken from: Mylee Joseph. *Active, engaged, valued: older people and NSW public libraries.* State Library of New South Wales, 2006. See: **http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/services/public_libraries/docs/active_engaged_valued.pdf**.

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About this guide

This guide has been produced by Margaret Sloan and John Vincent. The work to produce and publish the guide has generously been funded by the Department of Health – thanks particularly to Nye Harries for this.

Margaret Sloan is former Access Liibrarian, Gloucestershire Libraries & Information and Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Fellow 2007, researching Expanding Library Services to Older People.

John Vincent is the networker for 'The Network – tackling social exclusion in libraries, museums, archives and galleries'.

Acknowledgments

Thanks for their support, particularly in producing case studies and examples of good practice to: Jill Barker (Gloucestershire Libraries & Information), Bill Bolloten (refugee education consultant), Nicola Brown (Dorset Libraries), Lindsay Casselden (South Tyneside Libraries), Linda Collins (Portsmouth Libraries), Helen Connery (Birmingham Libraries), Ann Day (Leeds Libraries), Michael Lewis (Leicester Libraries), Lynda Martin (Cambridgeshire Libraries), Shobha Mistry (Hillingdon Libraries), Tim O'Dell (Lambeth Libraries), Julie Ryder, Alan Sandham (Middlesbrough Libraries), Rosemary Steer (Suffolk Libraries).

Part 2: Policy Background

This section of the guide identifies key policies and strategies and helps set the context for developing work with older people.

Who are 'older people'?

The Department of Health sees older people as falling broadly into three groups:

- **entering old age – according to differing definitions, can include people aged 50+ or people who have reached the official retirement ages**
- **transitional – those in transition between healthy, active life and frailty**
- **frail older people.**

(Taken from: National service framework for older people. DOH, 2001, **http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstat istics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuida nce/DH_4003066)**

When thinking about older people in your local authority, a good starting point would be to check what it uses as its definition and compare this with other local organisations (eg the Devon Partnership NHS Trust's Mental Health Services for Older People is aimed at over-65s, see: **http://www.devonpartnership.nhs.uk/index.p hp?id=69)**.

How do we find out about older people generally?

- The important Audit Commission report, *Don't stop me now: preparing for an ageing population*, gives valuable background information, for example, on population trends. It outlines good practice for engaging with and responding to older people, including them at the start of designing services and offering equal access by 'age-proofing' mainstream services. **http://www.auditcommission.gov.uk/Produc ts/NATIONAL-REPORT/D1391254-78F6-42b8- 92A153004A972E34/DontStopMeNow17July 08REP.pdf**

- The Institute for Public Policy Research published *Older people and wellbeing* in July 2008. This is the first in a series of reports looking at overall trends in health and wellbeing, together with the factors that shape wellbeing in older people. For further information see: **http://www.ippr.org.uk/publicationsandrepo rts/publication.asp?id=620**

- The Social Exclusion Unit report, *A sure start to later life: ending inequalities for older people*, gives evidence of the social exclusion that older people face and recommends action to be taken **http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/social_excl usion_task_force/~/media/assets/www.cabin etoffice.gov.uk/social_exclusion_task_force/ publications_1997_to_2006/a_sure_start%20 pdf.ashx**

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- *The Age Agenda 2008: public policy and older people.* Age Concern, 2008
**Further details from:
http://www.ageconcern.org.uk/bookshop/index.cfm?fuseaction=product&product=F39676D6-E7FB-1C5F-EA1222E5FE446274)**

- *Putting people first: a shared vision and commitment to the transformation of adult social care* (DOH, 2007) commits central and local government to the transformation of adult social care
http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_081118

How do we find out about the needs of specific groups of older people?

- *Older refugees in the UK: a literature review and interviews with refugees.* Refugee Council, 2008
http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/D197F4CA-646C-43E4-8269-0B74328D8CFC/0/older_refugees_in_the_uk_jan_2008.pdf

- Grandparents as kinship carers – see, for example,
http://www.csci.org.uk/about_csci/what_is_social_care/world_of_social_care/caring_kith_and_kin.aspx

How do we find out about older people in our region?

- Government offices, for example, Government Office for the South West
http://www.gos.gov.uk/gosw/publichealth/improvinghealth/azpublichealth/healthandolderpeople/

- Census information, eg East Midlands example
http://www.statistics.gov.uk/census2001/profiles/e.asp

- Regional public health observatories, for example South West Public Health Observatory
http://www.swpho.nhs.uk/

How do we find out about older people in our area?

Much information can be obtained from our partners – see the section 'Who else should we be working with?' below.

In addition -

- Age Concern – the UK-wide website allows you to search for your local Age Concern
http://www.ageconcern.org.uk/AgeConcern/default.asp?gclid=COCYzpHlxpQCFQYaEAod9FQakg

- Local authority information, such as Hertfordshire's webpage which links to organisations and sources of information and advice, **http://www.hertsdirect.org/comdirectory/comvol/old2y/**

MAIDeN , the multi-agency database for information about neighbourhoods in Gloucestershire, http://www.maiden.gov.uk/, which includes research into Gloucestershire's ageing population (Sept 2007),
http://www.maiden.gov.uk/gopasdc250907.pdf

- Local authority adult social care services, such as Lincolnshire County Council
http://www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/section.asp?sectiontype=listmixed&catid=2446

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How can we involve older people in developing our services?

As with many groups, older people are often over-consulted, so involvement has to be practical and meaningful.

A key way of contacting them is via our existing range of activities and services, such as mobile libraries and at-home services.

In addition, some good ways of contacting and involving individuals are via:

- **older people's forums**
- **better government for older people**
- **older people's assemblies**
- **older people's networks**
- **user panels**
- **day centre or care home user groups**
- **older persons' services planning groups or forums**
- **project-specific working groups.**

Some local authorities (eg Cambridgeshire – see: **http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/social/old er/getengagedinyouragenda/) have developed good practice in promoting the involvement of older people.**

How can we develop a strategy for working with older people?

Part 3 of this guide outlines the steps required to draw up a strategy for developing library work with older people.

What types of services could we provide?

Part 4 of this guide includes practical examples, as well as case studies to illustrate how some libraries have already developed these.

Public libraries should support the four key areas of the wellbeing agenda:
- **stimulation**
- **bringing older people together**
- **reducing isolation**
- **socialisation.**

To do this effectively we need to focus on equality of access. This includes access to materials and information (in the library, on the mobile library, at home) and individual access to our catalogues via the mobile library, the internet, or some sort of telephone enquiry service.

Who else should we be working with?

- Care organisations and establishments [care homes]
- Health providers, such as Primary Care Trusts
- Local authority adult services
- Voluntary sector
- Better Government for Older People
  See **http://www.bgop.org.uk/index.aspx?pri marycat=2 for national overview and links to the regional BGOP contacts**
- Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP)
  There is an LSP for almost every part of England and Wales, bringing together key local partners.

The LSP creates a long-term vision to help the area to tackle local needs. The vision is set out in the sustainable community strategy (SCS). The local area agreement (LAA) is the mechanism for making the vision a reality. All the outcomes and targets are designed to deliver the vision set out in the SCS. For further information, see: **http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pa geId=7890619**.

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• Sustainable Community Strategy is a long-term vision for an area and its people. It aims to create a sustainable community by addressing economic, social and environmental needs. For further information, see: **http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=80829** .

• Local Area Agreement is a three-year agreement between a local area and central government. The LAA describes how local priorities will be met by delivering local solutions. For further information, see: **http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=6908743** .

• Local Health & Wellbeing Strategy Libraries should be included in these local strategies. See the following examples:

Royal Borough of Kingston: **http://www.kingston.gov.uk/indepd_wellbeingplan.pdf**.

West Berkshire: **http://www.westberks.gov.uk/media/pdf/1/0/Health___WB_Strategy__final_Mar_07.pdf**.

• Local Older People's Strategy See, for example, North Lincolnshire **http://www.northlincs.gov.uk/NorthLincs/SocialCare/olderpeople/OlderPeoplesServiceStrategyExecutiveSummary.htm** .

• Joint Strategic Needs Assessment. This is the requirement that local authorities and Primary Care Trusts produce an assessment of the health and wellbeing of the local community **http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_081097** .

How can we evaluate the work we're doing?

• **PLUS** The Public Library Users Survey (and its companion-surveys, such as Community PLUS, a resident's survey conducted by post or telephone; and ePLUS, the survey of the use and value of ICT in libraries) assesses library users' views of services and can be used to help evaluate provision for older people – and the gaps in it.

• **Inspiring Learning for All** (see: **http://www.inspiringlearningforall.gov.uk/introduction/default.aspx**) is a toolset for measuring Generic Learning Outcomes, the five areas where libraries can make an impact – see: **http://www.inspiringlearningforall.gov.uk/uploads/GLO%20checklist.doc**

• **Generic Social Outcomes (GSOs)** GSOs aim to describe and evidence the impact of museums, libraries and archives on service users and communities (for background information, see: **http://www.mla.gov.uk/policy/Communities/gso_overview**). The framework for GSOs is at: **http://www.mla.gov.uk/resources/assets//G/gso_framework_12198.pdf**.

• Local authorities must meet the new National Indicators Set. Of particular interest is how libraries can contribute to NI 138 (Satisfaction of people over 65 with both home and neighbourhood) and NI 139 (People over 65 who receive the information and support needed to exercise choice and live independently).

• The new performance framework for local authorities and local authority partnerships: single set of National Indicators (DCLG, 2007), http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/local government/pdf/505713.pdf .

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• The Laser Foundation Libraries Impact Project Report[6] (2005) includes a methodology for measuring impact on older people and a useful template for a survey of their needs **http://www.bl.uk/aboutus/acrossuk/workpub /laser/news/awards2004/laserfinal6.pdf** .

• Consultation & feedback, both formal and informal.

How can we develop advocacy around our work, so that other agencies can see what we contribute?

At the local level, we need to ensure that people across our local authorities – in other departments, senior managers, councillors – are fully aware of the role we play in supporting older people. We also need to promote our services to the local community by getting involved in local events.

At a wider level, we need awareness of government priorities and how library services can work to meet these:

• **Shared Priorities** – seven areas where central and local government have agreed that there should be development. See, for example, the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council's outline of how its members can deliver against these: **http://www.mla.gov.uk/policy/Communities/s hared_priorities** .

• **New partnership agreement between central and local government** – Central-local concordat 12 December 2007 **http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/l ocalgovernment/pdf/601000** This concordat means that central and local government are partners in delivering improved services. It aims to "anticipate the needs and aspirations of an ageing society through

preventative measures that encourage greater independence and wellbeing for older citizens".

We also need to ensure that our work is allied to broader social policy, for example:

• **social justice** Web resource from the Welsh Assembly Government on the concept of social justice **http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/socialjustice/?l ang=en** paper outlining where libraries can contribute **http://www.seapn.org.uk/content_files/files/s ocial_justice_and_inclusion_paper300707.doc**

• **community cohesion** See background information on the IDeA Knowledge website: **http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pa geId=5770040**

• **community engagement** community engagement 'how to' guide – web resource from Communities Scotland **http://www.communitiesscotland.gov.uk/stell ent/groups/public/documents/webpages/scrcs _006693.hcsp** resources to support public libraries **http://www.mla.gov.uk/programmes/framew ork/framework_programmes/Community_Eng agement_resources**

• **tackling social exclusion** Information about the government's Social Exclusion Task Force **http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/social_exclus ion_task_force.aspx**

Museums, Libraries and Archives Council's activity on social inclusion **http://www.mla.gov.uk/website/policy/Inclusio n/MLA_Activity_on_Social_Inclusion** .

[6] This report also includes some useful examples of the importance of libraries' provision. For example, in Lancashire 55% of respondents from the sheltered housing and care homes' library service said they read more after the visits than they did before. (See p83-85).

Part 3: Developing a strategy for library services to older people

How to start

Most libraries have services and activities for older customers but how many have a strategy for this group?

However innovative an activity or project, it will have a finite lifespan. A strategy, however, can put individual actions into a context and create the opportunity for greater sustainability and continuity. The development of a strategy is a learning process. It gives libraries the opportunity to explore – with older people – what kind of services they want, as well as giving them the opportunity to find out more about what libraries can offer.

A strategy can cover all the issues and enable the development of a comprehensive suite of services and activities, supported by the appropriate marketing, staff training and so on. The development of a strategy is an acknowledgement that the library has an increasing role to play in supporting the ability of older people to live independently and remain actively engaged in the community and the world of learning.

The following important elements are key to developing a strategy.

Consultation:

Who should be consulted?

Existing older customers can be asked both formally and informally in any library groups via short questionnaires at the counter; questionnaires and telephone calls to at-home service users and people receiving a service via a dedicated older people/care homes mobile. Don't forget the older volunteers. Older people are often less likely to speak out and make their views known, so informal discussions can also be valuable.

In addition:

- It is important to think about how to reach people who don't currently use our services. This can done be via representative local organisations such as Older People's Assemblies, U3A, Age Concern, etc. It is an opportunity to acquaint and reacquaint people with library services, showing how they have developed and expanded.
- Focus groups have been used effectively with both users and non-users.
- The library website and e-mail should be actively used to seek people's views.
- Library Community Management Boards (as constituted by the Community Libraries receiving Big Lottery Funding) must reflect their communities, so will include a proportion of older people and representatives from older people's organisations.

What to ask

- What do people want from a library service and library activities?
- What don't they want?
- What do people think the library does well for older people?
- What does it do less well?
- Within available resources what could the library do better for older people – for example with collections, services (including at-home services) and programming?
- What could the library do to attract more older people – including those who have just retired and those who have been retired for 10 years or more?
- Do older customers find the library environment comfortable and welcoming? How could this be improved?

Suggestions for development and activities could be included on a questionnaire to prompt responses and further ideas from customers.

Part 3: Developing a strategy for library services to older people

Are there any barriers to older people using library services?

Consultation is a great opportunity to explore possible barriers to library use. Examples of barriers – and the challenges these pose for service providers – are given later in this guide.

Consultation is ongoing
To be effective and result in a service which is responsive to older people's needs, consultation needs to be ongoing. Services do not stand still and feedback is essential to discover emerging or changing needs.

Staff participation

Engagement

Experience shows it is vital to have core policy staff working with branch staff on engagement, ideas and developing the work with older people. One member of staff from each branch (for example someone who really likes working with older people) could also become part of a strategy development team which then continues as an ongoing liaison group. These people can also work locally with older people's organisations, sometimes co-organising activities and events.

Confidence

All staff should be encouraged to contribute ideas to the strategy. Front-line workers have a great deal of contact with library users and will have ideas arising from this. Staff induction training should also include support on working with older people.

A comfortable and encouraging environment

Libraries need to be friendly and welcoming to both service users and volunteers. This includes issues around physical access, assistive materials and technology and a positive staff attitude. If this aspect is not right, older people may not even spend time finding out about what services are on can offer. Older customers need staff who are not too busy to assist them. They also like quieter areas in which to read. Work with and train older volunteers so they can help do an assessment, or 'audit', of your library. This should consider access, signage, ease of use, comfort and convenience. For further information, see the checklist – 'Is Your Library Older People Friendly?' at the end of this guide.

Marketing

Marketing is crucial. It can introduce library services to new users and reintroduce them to lapsed ones, showing how much has changed. When successfully targeted at a range of users it can show how well we respond to changing needs. All such marketing also raises the general profile of our services.

Some libraries have made productive contacts with local newspapers and magazines, reaping results in increased numbers of new and returning older customers. Others offer older people's lifestyle titles free distribution in return for free advertising. Relationships with the media, especially local daily papers, can be very successful in reaching older people who otherwise might not think about the library.

Part 3: Developing a strategy for library services to older people

How to start

Diversity and Inclusiveness

There are many aspects to diversity and inclusion. Our society is diverse in terms of cultural background, sexual preference, education and training, life chances and skills. All these sections of society are ageing, so we must look at older people as a diverse group – made up of all these others.

One function of a new strategy would be to ensure that older customers are included in all library developments, for instance, new technology. Older customers may initially need extra support to access these opportunities – new catalogue-browsing software or book and music downloads, for example – but technology can be especially beneficial to their needs. A newer generation of older people will be even keener than the last to participate in these developments.

Partnerships

Older user's needs are often complex and require a holistic approach to make a positive difference. This means collaborating with other agencies, including health care and charities, to extend the reach of the library and enhance the quality of customers' lives. Libraries should undertake an assessment of all the relevant organisations in the field locally and decide how to work in partnership with them. Different ways of working will be appropriate for different partners. Not all library-related activities need to take place in a library and partnerships can facilitate bringing services out to older people and offering them together with social contact.

Some libraries are now in the same local authority directorate as social services. This can facilitate new ways of working together, particularly to address issues of social isolation with inclusion initiatives. A team drawn from the library service and other council services could stimulate the necessary work for a comprehensive strategy and produce new ideas for services.

Libraries can reach more people if we work in partnership with other agencies. Remember that we can offer a gateway to much specialist information and activities, for example, information on health, making wills and leisure activities.

Checklists for progress

Checklists can be a useful way of monitoring progress. They can break the whole down into smaller areas, making it easier to assess whether the components for a comprehensive service are being put in place.

The 'Checklist for Library Services for Older People' at the end of this guide is a practical tool for assessing whether the library knows the local demography; has contact with older people's organisations and agencies; communications; suitable library activities and intergenerational projects; collections; staff responsibilities for working with older people and accessibility issues. Libraries can develop their own comprehensive checklists to ensure all elements are progressed throughout the service.

Checklists can also be used as part of the process of benchmarking your services for older people against those of your neighbouring local authorities.

Part 3: Developing a strategy for library services to older people

Resources

Many of the developments outlined in this guide require a change of focus and attitude, rather than more resources.

However it is also clear that greater emphasis is still being placed on the needs of children and young people (via the *Every Child Matters* agenda, for example) so we need to mount strong arguments as to why resources are required to develop better provision for older people.

One key step in this process is to gather evidence of the impact that our services are having.

Evaluation and advocacy

As well as recording the numbers using libraries and attending relevant events and activities, we need to gather more evidence of the impact of this work. As noted in Part 2, there are an increasing number of tools we can use. We must make sure that the evidence we gather is used as part of strong advocacy for our role in supporting older people at the different stages in their lives.

Part 4: Practicalities – working with older people, our valued customers

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Part 4: Practicalities – working with older people, our valued customers

Introduction

Older users can be some of our most faithful customers and supporters, with some regularly visiting libraries into their nineties. Many front-line staff work daily with older people and some have a great deal of experience from working on more targeted initiatives.

The information here will also help you think about future older customers. The large 'baby-boom' generation is now reaching its sixties – 'Blue Jeans not Blue Rinse!' – and may have different wishes and needs to the current older generation of service users.

In some societies the term 'elder' is one of respect. This usage has declined in our society so the preferred way to speak of people now is 'older people', 'older adults' or 'seniors' rather than 'the elderly'.

'We're all Apprentice Older People'

We should remind ourselves that a direct line runs between our lives now and those of our older users, to ourselves in the future.

Service

What are the most frustrating things you encounter which make you think you are getting bad customer service?

Examples include:

• being ignored
• not being listened to
• what you say being disregarded
• being talked at/down to/patronised/spoken to in a 'kind' voice.

The evidence is that all these things can happen more to people as they get older. People then begin to expect to be treated like this and they may:
• retreat and become timid, don't want to be a 'nuisance'
• become irritable
• just opt out – not use the service and tell others why they are not using it.

Quite simply, people want to be valued. If people make demands of libraries that we can satisfy, they will be among our strongest promoters.

In their own words

Older people would like to be treated with respect. Like anyone else, an older person can sense when they are not being respected or valued as a customer. In their own words, they would like:

• staff to have time for them – giving the impression they have time, not hurrying, not brusque
• they would appreciate staff taking a few moments to discuss the books brought back. Remember that the borrower may live on their own and be keen to share their enjoyment of a book – and where else but in a library
• normal common courtesy
• staff talking to them, not talking up or down to them, not patronising or condescending; not saying 'dear' or 'love'
• a smile is very important.

Other comments were:

• 'I'd like to be treated like a teenager/like anyone else.'
• 'It's not like we've lost our marbles.'
• 'One person can be old at 60, another young at 90'.

Part 4: Practicalities – working with older people, our valued customers

Assumptions

Making assumptions about people can lead to inappropriate customer care and a fall in customer satisfaction.

Older people are individuals like every other group in society:

• some read
• some are interested in many and new things
• some are happy and friendly
• some are a bit depressed because of health and other difficulties
• some are disabled
• all are different.

'You are as old as you feel'
'See the person not the grey hair'

Please don't assume people will only want one type of music, or books about one particular era. An attitude like that could make people reluctant to ask for assistance to find the type of book or film that they really want. For instance, some 1 in 5 people are gay – whether or not they have 'come out' – and older people as well as others need to feel comfortable about requesting books from library collections of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) literature.

Similarly, some people have a taste for more exotic reading and they should feel able to request this or any other literature without feeling embarrassed. This openness to peoples' wishes is important, as

the older people get the more they may need assistance in finding and selecting their reading.

Peoples' lives when they are elderly are still very much about the life chances they have had which have brought them to this particular point – the point at which you may be first encountering them. Libraries are there, as they always have been, to help redress the balance for those with less life chances and this is all part of the social inclusion work which we have been developing in recent years.

Recent research[7] has also demonstrated that some staff in public libraries still need support to develop the appropriate skills for working with all kinds of people. Training and support need to be provided to help staff avoid making assumptions and dealing in negative stereotypes.

Supporting Older Customers

Our aim is to support people to lead independent lives. Enjoying visits to the library and making your own selection is an important part of this independence, so we want to enable people to do this as long as possible.

Our customers may be affected by reduced sight, hearing, mobility and general health problems. This doesn't lessen – and may in fact increase – their desire to read and enjoy books in whatever format they prefer.

[7.] Kerry Wilson and Briony Birdi. The right 'man' for the job? The role of empathy in community librarianship. Sheffield University, 2008. **http://www.shef.ac.uk/content/1/c6/07/85/14/AHRC%202006-8%20final%20report%2004.08.pdf**.

Part 4: Practicalities – working with older people, our valued customers

Sight loss

Many people with visual impairment have gradually lost their sight as they have got older. Magnifying glasses and/or sheets should be on display at the counter so they are easily seen.

Having all library notices and announcements in large print can make life easier, as can clear guiding around the library.

Sight loss can make people very upset and angry. It is important that people know that they can still carry on enjoying books through large print and spoken word and that these are equally valid ways to read.

Does your library offer a special service to visually impaired customers, such as a mail out or subscription to RNIB's Talking Books? Do you have computer software available which enables people with visual impairments to use computers through magnification and speech? Make sure all staff know about these services and that information is available to customers in appropriate print and other formats. The most frequent comment about visual impairment reading services is that they are 'a lifeline'.

Hearing loss

Hearing loss can also increase gradually with age. We want to reduce any difficulty or embarrassment people might feel at the counter because of needing to ask a member of staff to speak loudly or to repeat something.

Hearing loops and portable hearing equipment on information desks can assist people who are hard of hearing or deaf and make them feel more welcome.

Tip: Have a small notepad and pen at the counter, together with a notice explaining that if someone has difficulty with hearing, they can write on the pad and staff will reply by writing on the pad, too.

Mobility

It is important to have clear pathways for people to be able to get around the library and reach the items they are interested in. This is useful not just for wheelchair users but also those with walking sticks or who are just a bit unsteady on their feet.

Tip: It's a good idea to walk the library yourself to see if there are any obstacles.

Dexterity

Many libraries have large keyboards for people who may have less dexterity. Please make sure that people know these keyboards are available – it may make all the difference between their trying or using the computer and not doing so.

Are staff available and looking out to help people take items off shelves where they might have difficulty?

Tip: If you telephone an older customer please allow them plenty of time to reach the phone and speak clearly in case they have some hearing loss

Part 4: Practicalities – working with older people, our valued customers

Access and Support

People's energy levels may drop as they get older, particularly if they have health issues. We want to make getting around the library as easy and enjoyable as possible.

We know that older customers are often particularly interested in the large print and spoken word books – can they reach these easily? Or are they a long way from the entrance, perhaps further than someone feels they can comfortably walk and then stand and choose?

Please be as alert to where people might need a little assistance – for example, suggesting that they might like to leave their books at the counter until they are ready to go. Have appropriate chairs – not too low – to sit on. It's all about unobtrusively giving help without the user feeling they have to ask and 'be a nuisance'.

Remember: We're all apprentice older people – and we're here to help customers.

Tip: You may like to suggest to customers that they keep a list of favourite authors that they can bring to the library to help them select books.

Isolation

Older people can have other needs apart from the physical. Many live alone and have been bereaved. Almost half of people over 75 years live alone. Many people's families are scattered. They may come to the library for social contact and want to have a good experience. They may be timid because of lack of social contact, or they may be talkative because they don't get much opportunity to chat to people. They may even have become slightly socially inept. What they are looking for is a welcome and someone to speak to who shares their interest in reading, music or films – or even just local happenings and the weather.

Keep in contact with your home-based readers, encourage them to be proactive in choosing their own books and consider setting up reading chains and groups.

Cultural diversity

Work with all our older users is about respect. Our customers will come from a variety of cultural backgrounds with a variety of ways of respecting individual dignity and older people. Every person can tell, however, whether they feel they are being treated with respect.

Our older population is now becoming more diverse as people who were part of the early post-war waves of immigration become more elderly. Find ways to know who your customers are and the things that may be important to them.

New reading

Many of our older customers are avid and prolific readers. They may tend to stick to a few favourite authors or types of book and have exhausted this stock. Older people say they often like to be stimulated by something new. If you've always liked to read non-fiction you will still probably enjoy it when you are older – but you may choose something that isn't taxing for the times when you feel tired. Bear all this in mind when older people are choosing a range of books.

Part 4: Practicalities – working with older people, our valued customers

Older people and IT

Libraries are places where people can come and try something without feeling pressure to continue. This is very important with older people wishing to try computers for the first time and it is one of our many plus points. They probably won't want to commit themselves to a college-based formal course and they appreciate the kind of taster session they can get in a library, which they can do at their own pace.

Many want to use computers so they can email family who may be scattered around the world. Older people have said they want to use IT to:

• **learn new things**
• **record their memoirs**
• **do research on the internet**
• **find images of their favourite pictures**
• **recall their travels by visiting websites**
• **find other books by their favourite authors**
• **submit stories to authors' websites**
• **retain independence with shopping**
• **save money – for example, by accessing cheaper holiday deals.**

Computer access may also be an incentive to come to the library for retired people who are familiar with using computers at work but don't have one at home. Don't assume that all older people are beginners with computers.

Do you offer courses for updating skills and learning about new possibilities, like downloading music?

Can you offer computer assistance to at-home customers, especially on how to use the catalogue?

Tip: Telling people about the availability of larger keyboards and computer software for magnification or speech assistance could encourage them to have a go. Older customers may also need attention paid to their seating so they feel comfortable during a computer session.

Does your website have a special section targeted to older people? If it does, let people know about it.

Older people as a valuable resource

Don't think of older people simply as recipients of services. They are a great resource and contribute much to library services. Many volunteers are older people and libraries need to show how much we value their contribution.

As volunteers, older people:

• **help with story times for children – keen older readers can be very important in stimulating and supporting young readers**
• **deliver books to home-bound people**
• **help out at library groups**
• **support visually impaired people to use computers**
• **run friends' groups and raise money for the library**
• **run computer clubs in the library**
• **are speakers at library events**
• **are part of library community management boards.**

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Front-line staff can be valuable and active recruiters of older volunteers. Remember: libraries are in competition with other organisations for volunteers, so we need to make ourselves and the activities we offer as enticing as possible. One volunteer with a positive experience can encourage others.

Newer older people

What does it feel like to be growing older and retiring? What will people want to do with their lives? What role will libraries play in their lives and what can we offer?

Newer older people – now the baby boomer generation – will probably have greater expectations, be more used to technology and expect an 'on demand' one-stop-shop delivery style to meet their information needs as well as a desire to read.

Retirement means that people probably have less money and those who have been in the habit of buying books may now come back to libraries to borrow or just to sample.

People often want to devote more time to their hobbies and may look to libraries for books and information to support this. From their many years in the workplace these people will be skilled and knowledgeable: they will not always want to be offered simple texts, even if they are beginners trying out new hobbies.

This new older generation has had a much greater element of choice in their lives than many existing older library users. They will have wants as well as needs and – if libraries don't measure up – they will go elsewhere to access music, reading and audio-

visual entertainment. We need to make sure they are aware of the services we can provide and that we offer a suitably welcoming environment.

Good practice - a round-up

older people are all individuals

- Libraries are open and welcoming to all.
- Libraries are flexible enough to meet individual needs.
- Encourage people to try something new – a book, IT …
- Is a visit to a library comfortable?
- can people move around the library and reach what they want?
- are notices in large enough print to be easily read?
- is help on hand when it is needed?

Be pro-active

- offer people the full range of services – don't make assumptions and be selective
- if you haven't seen a regular older library customer for a while, why not contact them and see if they are still able to visit the library or whether they might like to come to a group, or receive the at-home service?
- if someone is only taking spoken word for sight reasons, ask them if they are interested in a mail-out service if you provide or subscribe to one.

Make people feel valued

- for example, get them to recommend books and display their recommendations
- ask someone if they would like to volunteer with the library service.

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Be part of a Library W O R L D view:-

Welcoming
Older people
with
Respect
and
Listen to them
remembering their
Dignity.

If you want to find out more about older people today, check out Age Concern England at **www.ageconcern.org.uk**

Working with older people - your suggestions to meet their needs

Have a look at these profiles of older customers and think about what suggestions you can make to meet their needs and wishes. Then see suggestions others have made.

Ellen and George are in their mid-70s and have been enjoying an active retirement for fifteen years. They have always been regular library users and visit the library once a week for three books each. Ellen likes historical novels and George chooses adventure stories. George has become a bit arthritic in his hands and sometimes has difficulties getting books off the shelf. They are involved with various social groups and set quizzes for fundraising. They use the library as a reference resource for the quiz questions and say they sometimes find the guidance to the particular type of reference books unclear. With the onset of some health difficulties in the last couple of years, Ellen and George are spending more time at home and

Ellen has started listening to some of the spoken word books. Life without their library books would seem very strange and they have been wondering what they can do if they are no longer able to visit the library regularly.
What are your suggestions to support Ellen and George?

Amy is in her late 50's and has had an active working and leisure life. She is looking forward to her forthcoming 'freedom', while being a little apprehensive about her reduced retirement income. She has been in the habit of buying paperbacks on impulse from bookshops. Amy thinks she will probably take up some new hobbies and light studying, or start learning a language. She is looking forward to spending more time with her young grandchildren and has thought about getting involved with a community organisation. She is used to obtaining her information pretty swiftly on demand. What she really dreads as she begins to look older, is being treated in an over-kind way and talked to as if she isn't totally able to comprehend.
What are your suggestions for staff to respond to Amy's needs?

John has just retired in his mid-sixties. He has been a keen traveller, often going on holidays that have some connection to his interest in history. He wants to travel for as long as he can and as long as he can afford it. He is very used to computers but still has dial-up at home. He has also been thinking he'd like to look into his family history. In fact he's wondering what he'll do with all his spare time.
What are your suggestions as to what libraries can offer John?

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Annie recently went to the eye clinic and was told that her sight is gradually failing. She has always been a keen reader and library customer, even more so since her husband died two years ago. She moved to large print books a while ago and has been pleased to find that more are now available and she can get the books her daughter talks about more quickly now in large print. Annie couldn't quite take everything in at the eye clinic and she feels pretty down and sometimes angry about it all.
How can the library help and support Annie in her new situation?

Rabia and Shanta are 65 and 70 years old and attend a day care centre. Both have weak eyesight but were keen readers. They are both now more interested in religion than they used to be. They also want to watch videos for relaxation. Their English is not very good and they would like material in their mother tongue.
What are your suggestions for staff to support Rabia and Shanta?

Jean and Harry have just moved into the area for their retirement and staff don't yet know what kind of customer needs they may have. They seem as if they will be regular library users and will also be keen to get involved with local activities.
How will you find out what their wishes are and let them know about all the library can offer? How would you follow up the customer service afterwards?

Some suggestions to meet the needs of older customers

Ellen and George

• Keep an eye out for when George might need help getting books off the shelves.

• Suggest they might take more books – but bear in mind that they have to carry them and ensure they know about renewing by phone.

• Look at guiding them to popular reference books to see if clear and encourage them to ask for assistance.

• Make sure they know about the at-home service and any library group with some transport arrangements in case they find it too difficult to come to the library independently.

Amy

• Tell her about FastBacks and how she can request new book titles.

• She might want to look at language books in the library before committing herself to a course.

• Show her the children's library and all the different books for different ages.

• Make sure she knows about the community information held by the library (in print and on the web) so she can find out about organisations she might want to get involved with.

• Tell her that the library is looking for volunteers in her areas of interest.

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John

• Suggest he uses the library computers when he wants to do a lot of internet research for his travels: nternet and travel books are together in one place and he can borrow travel guides before deciding whether to purchase one.

• Tell him about all the library resources for family history.

• Let him know about opportunities for volunteering in the library, such as computer mentoring and volunteer driving for a library group.

Annie

• Tell Annie about the mail out service for visually impaired customers (if your library has one) and about the RNIB Talking Books service.

• Suggest she might like to come to a library group where someone can help her choose large print or spoken word books and she can chat with other keen readers.

• Tell Annie about any computer possibilities you offer to people with visual impairments.

• Give her information about any visual impairment groups locally or nationally.

Rabia and Shanta

• Find out their first language and religion.

• Rabia could be Urdu-speaking.
• Shanta could be Gujarati-speaking.

• Suggest large print books.

• Suggest appropriate religious videos/CDs/ spoken word options.

• Suggest Bollywood folk music and classic films.

Jean and Harry

• When they visit the library draw attention to various options, including computer sessions and the visually impaired service.

• Find out if they have an interest in computers – either to have an introductory session, to use the machines or to become a computer buddy.

• Mention other opportunities for volunteering, for example: at-home delivery, library club, children's storytime.

• Draw attention to the community database showing local organisations they may be interested in joining and any other local group information held at the library.

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A kaleidoscope of activities

All libraries run programmes to enhance the enjoyment of their existing users and to get more people into libraries to find out about what we have to offer.

A display board devoted to promoting seniors' activities and services would show customers that this is an important part of the service. A seating area close by the board would offer a welcome.

There is an appetite for stimulating programmes targeted directly at older people. Their own ideas for such programmes and events should be sought as part of ongoing consultation. Seniors want to keep up with contemporary life and programming should reflect this.

Your library may want to widen participation by different groups and you can link up with various organisations to publicise your programme on their websites, as a way of attracting more diverse attendance.

Libraries can approach programming in different ways: either by having a dedicated staff member, by organising with branches at local level or a combination of both. Events can be organised in partnership with an older people's group or by organisations with specialist information, for example, on how to make a will.

Who else might come along? Some libraries are finding that seniors now seem to be acting more as carers for their grandchildren and they have found that events targeted at older people are more successful if they include children's activities.

Programmes need to consider timing and venue, whether people want to go to a particular place in the evening, public transport, parking and street lighting. Remember too that not all library-related activities need to take place in a library.

Finally, libraries have a vital part to play in informal adult learning. That is: 'Part-time, non-accredited learning for leisure, pleasure, development of new skills, self-development or community development – like belonging to a book club, finding out about local history through the internet, improving a sporting skill, attending a computer, yoga or language class, joining a family learning programme or attending a lecture on a topic you're interested in.' (DIUS[8])

Libraries have the ability and the materials to offer a stimulating kaleidoscope of activities to their older customers and to potential new ones. Here are some suggestions:

• **Book and reading groups**
  Most libraries already have author events and support book groups. Book groups targeted at older people could be started and similarly supported with initial librarian input and book sets, including alternative formats. Libraries could be the venue for such groups, alongside sheltered housing and residential homes. Visual impairment reading groups could be supported. Telephone reading groups and reading chains can be set up for at-home users. Book groups could also take part in activities for an adult summer reading challenge, or a cross-city or county book event.

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Offering a 'how to run a book group' session can stimulate the development of such groups and also draw in interested people who could become local initiators.

• **Discussion group**
These can be popular and respond to older people's desire to remain up-to-date with contemporary life. They can be run by the library or in conjunction with a local university, college or WEA and be supported with handouts for those attendees who want to take the topic further.

• **Library clubs and groups**
Some libraries have run clubs or groups for a number of years. Sometimes monthly, sometimes weekly, they offer an opportunity for older people – often at home – to come into the library and choose their own books and other materials, with assistance if they wish. Transport may be provided for people with mobility difficulties. Some groups have a wide variety of activities.

• **Coffee and conversation**
Informal drop-in groups, run with the assistance of volunteers, maybe weekly or monthly, can offer sociability in a library setting. The coffee–and–conversation formula has also been successfully applied to informal English-language practice for new arrivals, such as refugees or migrant workers.

• **Memoir writing**
This can be an introductory session or a series of classes. The activity fits well with library services that offer suitable materials – including books, local studies, internet access – to support writing. Creating memoirs can also be part of the work of a writer–in–residence.

• **Film**
Film is very popular with many older people, particularly classic movies, comedy, travel and documentaries. As a regular session, this also draws members and potential members into the library and has a social aspect. Volunteers can support the sessions and offer refreshments. Film can also appeal to people who speak English as a second language.

• **Seniors day/month**
This type of programming also gives the opportunity to market and try out different activities, gaining feedback and experience and publicising the library's role in offering such activities. A buzz can be created with a month-long programme. Activities can also be organised with new partners and in conjunction with day centres and residential accommodation. Successful events can then be considered as ongoing activities.

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- **'Full of Life'**
Under the this banner[9] , the government and other supporting groups are undertaking a wide programme of activity to raise the profile of the issues surrounding older people and our ageing society. A major focus is UK Older People's Day[10] . Libraries could programme activities to coincide with this and to advocate the role they play in supporting seniors more generally, perhaps using the 'Full of Life' events ideas toolkit[11] .

- **Locally placed collections**
There are benefits in trying to locate targeted collections close to older customers – such as those who live in villages – and combining this with an opportunity for social contact. More older people can be attracted to use or return to the library service. Volunteers can also be attracted to this activity, seeing it as part of their community life.

- **Reading programmes**
Many library services offer mobile services or collections to residential homes – but how can the library go further and promote the use of these collections by developing services to the residents? A 'reading out loud' programme with volunteers can bring reading and social contact benefits to residents who have difficulty in accessing books themselves.

- **Themed events**
National or local events give an opportunity for libraries to showcase their role. For example, libraries can organise activities as part of Black History Month or LGBT History Month.

- **IT-related programmes – in libraries**
Staff need adequate training to offer customers IT awareness, beginner and more advanced training. This should also include awareness of working with seniors. Older people often benefit from receiving their IT training either via one-to-one sessions or in small-group training.

Drop-in cyber cafes targeted at older people can be promoted for specific periods of time and one-to-one sessions with staff can be supplemented by computer volunteers.

Inclusive use of new technology sessions on how to download books or music, or on any other new technological development, can ensure seniors are automatically included.

IT sessions with can be facilitated by the access features available on People's Network computers and through magnification and voice recognition software and assistive equipment.

Many libraries also offer activities for Silver Surfer Week – see: **http://www.silversurfer.org.uk/**.

- **IT-related programmes – for at-home customers**
Staff or trained volunteers can visit customers at home and assist them with setting up e-mail and internet as well as showing how to use the online catalogue. Assistive technology could also be used in this setting. Bournemouth Library Service ran a brief pilot project to explore this but, sadly, was unable to find further funding. Staff and/or volunteers can also offer IT sessions in sheltered housing, residential homes, etc.

[9.] See: **http://www.dwp.gov.uk/opportunity_age/fulloflife/**.
[10.] For 2008, this is on 1 October.
[11.] See: **http://www.dwp.gov.uk/opportunity_age/fulloflife/toolkit_interactive.pdf**.

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- **IT-related programmes – online catalogue training**
Telephone-based online catalogue training with outreach customers will be useful for those with computers at home. This could also expand the benefit they derive from the at-home delivery service.

- **Other activities organised with partners**
Partnerships with specialist groups and/or those working with older people can result in new activities and programmes. Once it becomes known that the library is open to suggestions, groups who want to reach seniors will see the library as a potential partner.

Examples include:

- **taster courses**
- **using libraries as venues for drop-in information sessions by other organisations, such as visual impairment groups**
- **wellbeing services, eg Northamptonshire Libraries and Information Service, http://www.northamptonshire.gov.uk/Leisure/Libraries/Reading/wbeing.htm**
- **'Books on Prescription' schemes, organised, for example, with the local Primary Care Trust. For an overview, see: http://www.ebase.bcu.ac.uk/events/health-option-full-abstract.html**
- **intergenerational work[12] , eg North East Lincolnshire Libraries' work with old school photographs, http://www.lovelibraries.co.uk/downloads/librarians_07/PhyllSmith.pdf**

Information and websites

Older adults are not a homogeneous group. There are different generations among them with varying life experiences and expectations and changing circumstances for older people may impact on the information they need and how they want to access it.

Information

The University of Reading's research project in Slough (supported by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation) Older people's views on information, advice and advocacy, includes some important pointers[13] , including -

Barriers to accessing information:

- becoming aware that there was information that could help their situation
- gaining access to appropriate and comprehensive information and advice
- receiving practical assistance.

Findings – older people:

- welcomed advice that helped relate information to their particular circumstances – volume of information problematic and distinctions between information, advice and advocacy not meaningful
- valued information that was topic based – not agency based
- had diverse approaches to obtaining information – wanted timely information, often at a point of change or crisis in their lives and comprehensive information offered actively

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[12] See also: *Intergenerational programmes: an introduction and examples of practice.* Centre for Intergenerational Practice, 2006.

[13] See: www.jrf.org.uk/knowledge/findings/socialcare/623.asp

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• follow-up service appreciated
• services struggled to provide accurate and comprehensive information to older people, in the absence of resources to develop and maintain databases
• older people's preferred solutions included an information bank and an information centre to provide a point of contact.

Service providers distinguished between the provision of information, advice or advocacy. Older people more readily identified services as providing assistance or help and were less likely to recognise information giving as a service in its own right.

Older people wanted information on:

• **health and social care services**
• **welfare benefits**
• **reliable trades-people.**

Those who were not seeking information for themselves did not usually turn to formal advice services but asked family, friends and professionals for help. In addition, health and social care staff were not always aware of the full range of services.

It is also important to remember that some people do not see themselves as old and would not readily access services labelled for seniors.

Recommendations:

• an information bank – to provide a comprehensive and updated source of information for service providers, accessible to older people
• an information centre – to provide a point of

contact for seniors

• statutory services should work in partnership with voluntary organisations to set up a co-ordinated database
• services should work together to provide a comprehensive centre for older users, rather than setting up a series of separate information resource centres.

Websites

A website specifically targeted at seniors can demonstrate that they are a valued part of the library constituency.

In countries such as Canada, many libraries have web pages targeted at older people. They offer information on library programmes, reading lists (books to retire with, books relevant to carers, etc) gateway links to external programmes for older people, health information, leisure and travel information, government and legal information. Library experiences with such websites show that -

• Involvement of the user group from the start will make this a more relevant and useful website.

• Web-based information often works best for older people when it is complemented by physical information points and older people's activity groups in libraries. These can be informal and self-run.

• A targeted website can be used to consult older people on their views about existing and potential library services. It can also be an important marketing tool.

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When building a programme of information for older people, the library can marry it with assistance and learning on how to seek all different types of information, in all formats and in all locations.

Sessions on topics of interest – such as how to write your will, insurance for older people, health issues, safety in the home – can be mixed with other sessions on more general topics.

The mobile library is often an under-used resource for reaching older service users. It can have easy-access terminals and can offer regular longer stops aimed at older customers, which would be particularly useful for those with mobility problems.

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Case studies and examples of good practice

Library clubs in Gloucestershire

Gloucestershire Libraries & Information has been running very successful monthly library clubs for a number of years. These offer a rewarding experience for isolated and vulnerable customers who are often, but not always, home-bound. More recently library clubs have been held during usual opening hours. Sessions last for one to one-and-a-half hours, include tea and biscuits and are run by at least one staff member alongside volunteers. A very important aspect is the council's payment for the use of community transport (through contracts with schemes like Dial-a-Ride, or individual transport with volunteer drivers).

Library clubs are an alternative to an at-home delivery service (which the libraries also offer). Club members say they appreciate having the help of library staff and the chance to choose their own books – rather than having someone else choose for them – and making reservations to collect at the next meeting. Informality is key to success here – only occasionally is there a programmed speaker. The chat and sociability of the groups is important given the isolation in which some people live. The fact that the selected pile of books can be carried by others means customers can take as many books as they wish for the month.

An important spin-off from the library clubs has been the development of Book Choice, a newsletter giving short reviews from library club members. Published bi-monthly, it gives customers recommendations from fellow members for new books to read. Originally a staff member spoke to members about their reading but most reviews now come in by email from staff at library clubs and the newsletter is written by a volunteer. The newsletter also evidences the wide-ranging reading of the library club members.

Mini-library clubs have also started, based on the same idea of bringing people in to a venue where they can choose their books. These mini-library clubs have been started with village agents who are trying to address the issues faced by older people in rural areas. The village agent obtains a collection of books from the nearest library, organises a village venue and local transport with volunteers where needed. Again, there is tea and a chat –making it a more social experience than visiting a mobile library.

Comments from library club members include:

"It's lovely to meet people and have a conversation."

"They (volunteers and staff) read the story information on the back for me."

"I've got a long day to get through most days and if I wasn't able to read or have these books it would be a tiring day."

"We can walk around at our leisure."

"Great having a bus ride to the library and friendly staff to cheer us up."

"I love the company and it gives you more to think about."

"It's so good to talk to people with different views and opinions."

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Case studies and examples of good practice

Top Time – weekly activities for older people in Suffolk Libraries

The concept of Top Time grew from a commitment to develop a weekly activity for older customers, using space, connections and talent from within the library service, other parts of the directorate, partners and the community.

Suffolk libraries and archives form part of the Adult and Community Services Directorate, which includes adult social care, adult learning, culture, information and inclusion. Top Time aims to support the directorate's wellbeing and 'access to everyday life' agenda. Library staff work alongside social care colleagues to support older people to stay independent for longer and enjoy a better quality of life.

Top Time was piloted in the newly refurbished Felixstowe Library and has proved a great success, with a wide-ranging weekly programme shaped by the participants themselves. Activities include talks, craft sessions (some led by the participants), chair-based exercise and live music. Several spin-off groups – for theatre, writing and reading – have developed in response to demand.

Feedback about the sessions shows that Top Time really does help to make a difference to individual lives. Two recently bereaved ladies struck up a friendship through Top Time, helping to come to terms with their losses and to try out new activities together. A man whose wife had been admitted to a nursing home said he joined the group 'with the object of getting out of the four walls of my bungalow and meeting people.' Others enjoy sampling new activities with the like-minded. One 80-year-old recently told her washing machine repair man: "Hurry up young man, I am about to go off to a salsa session at the library."

Several other libraries across Suffolk are now developing their own versions of Top Time and we hope to have around a dozen groups up and running by the end of 2008.

Part 4: Practicalities – working with older people, our valued customers

Case studies and examples of good practice

Suffolk at home library service reading and writing groups

Suffolk Libraries, in partnership with Suffolk Artlink (a local voluntary agency for the arts) set up monthly reading groups for At Home Library Service (AHLS) customers in six libraries across the county. Artlink provides transport and the library provides the venue and staff support.

The service also offers creative writing sessions to all the AHLS reading groups, with Artlink providing the funding for poet Michael Laskey to work with each group over two sessions.

Last year a selection of the resulting poems was published in *About Life,* Suffolk Age Concern's magazine. This year, a grant from English Heritage enabled the publication of complete book of poems and prose – called *Full of Life* – from the results of the workshops with Michael. It is available in all libraries. The work is moving, full of insights and memories and in some cases laced with humour. Feedback from participants at the writing workshops has been very positive:

"Great fun – I am realising how I have always loved writing and am rediscovering it."

"These classes have started me writing about my life, for my children."

"Good interaction. Confidence building and very enjoyable."

Part 4: Practicalities – working with older people, our valued customers

Case studies and examples of good practice

Reading groups and chains

Middlesbrough has a telephone book club of older home-bound people, which uses teleconferencing. The idea came from a volunteer coordinator at CSV-RSVP (Community Service Volunteers – Retired & Senior Volunteer Programme) who found an older person to facilitate the book club, which has a monthly teleconference. Isolation is the key factor for participants. The mobile library was used to contact people, via its at-home delivery service. A photo of all the members was taken, so at the first telephone meeting they each knew who they were talking to.

The library supplies books, which are chosen from a list it has produced. It includes synopses and indicates the format in whicy they are available. The club has been going for nearly two years with six members – a good number for the telephone discussions. Technology and deliveries have worked well and all the original participants are still members.

Dorset has run a pilot reading chain to support the needs of Home Library Service (HLS) users.

Chains enable small groups of HLS users to discuss books, read different things, discover new authors and share ideas for a good read. Members were recruited via a coffee morning. Six members made two chains, with two library staff also joining. Each member nominated a book, which had to be at least one year old (for ease of availability to the library). Loans were for a month, in large print or audio if required. The chains ran smoothly and books were returned promptly. The HLS delivery volunteers were enthusiastic and would be invaluable in creating or promoting future chains and suggesting potential members. Feedback was encouraging: the majority enjoyed most of the books and saw the chains as a good way of finding new authors and different reading experiences. Not all seemed to want follow up meetings. Some seemed happy just to have different books and share their thoughts and ideas via reviews. The short reviews themselves were very interesting and in future they may be part of a possible newsletter for Home Library Service users, as a way of keeping in touch with the service, reading and each other.

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Case studies and examples of good practice

ICT – Leeds Libraries UK online centre

Arun Gupta – Holt Park Library

Dr Arun Gupta started coming to Holt Park Library, aged 62, to learn more about computers, keep up with his friends and find ways of using his new skills to help the local community.

"I had a little bit of computer experience before coming to the library," he says. "I worked for the local authority housing department and I used their programs and internal e-mails. I could type letters and save them, bring them back, copy them. I was able to attach things with e-mail but I had very little internet experience.

"When I started going to the library I had to refresh my memory because I'd forgotten a lot of it. I had finished my job a year-and-a-half earlier and was getting out of touch with IT. The beginner classes helped a lot. I had been thinking of doing a computer course but it would have cost £200 and there was a lot of travelling time involved. I'm not looking for a job, so the certificate would have been no good to me. I just wanted something basic which keeps my hand in with modern technology. My friend said I'd be wasting my money and he told me about the free sessions at the library.

"He said he has learned a lot from the library. They've got free sessions where they can teach about whatever you're interested in and you can use free computers and the internet. So he started me off with the internet and then I had a

few sessions on Microsoft Word. The last session was on how to make a poster. Then if I want to specialise, I can have a special course or more one-to-ones.

"I thought the sessions were good, very informative. The staff are very helpful. Sometimes I had one-to-one sessions and sometimes I went to sessions with my friend. You see, after a certain age things go very slow in your brain so it takes time. And you get frustrated if you don't succeed in one or two goes, whereas when you're young you've got more patience. Whatever I learn I keep doing it for practise because unless you do it a few times it doesn't stay in your memory.

"I'm thinking of getting a computer at home but because I'm not technically minded I'm always debating which one to get. It would be handy to have one but I wonder if it's worth spending the money because the technology changes so fast. That's why I go once or twice a week to the library and do a little bit of e-mailing and playing around so that my memory is always refreshed.

"I'm not looking at it from a business point of view now but from a personal perspective. If I get involved with any organisations as a volunteer, this is the only way I can help them – I can't do a lot of leg-work due to my mobility problems. But I could help by sitting and doing paperwork on the computer. That's something I might like to do because you get fed-up sitting at home on your own.

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Case studies and examples of good practice

"I've got health problems, especially with walking. I've got diabetes, high blood pressure and I was on dialysis for six years. Fortunately two years ago I got a kidney which is working 75% well. I've got neuropathy in my feet, I can hardly walk and I need a stick. I have no sensation in my feet.

"I want to do something to utilise my time and feel that the computer is one way that I can make my contribution. I can type in Microsoft Word, do a newsletter or a poster.

"I'm a member of the Kidney Patients' Association at Leeds General Infirmary but I don't get active on the committee because I know I can't do much running around. However, they have a newsletter and if they want to put a picture in there I can take a one and then download it. That's why I thought IT skills were a good thing to learn.

"I use e-mails to talk to friends in this country and one or two in India. At work the internal system was slightly different, so I learnt how to do it at the library. My friends are pleased that I am online now. Before I could only communicate by phone so this has helped me to keep in touch. If I want to send my own pictures to India most of my relatives are elderly, they are not on computers – but the youngsters are. So at least I know they can show stuff to my elderly relatives.

"In this day and age you can't live without computers. We use them for everyday life, shopping and banking. The way things are going I probably soon won't be able to live without one. I too may be ordering groceries and banking online one day. Once you learn how to do these things, it's up to you to use them to help yourself."

UK Online Social Impact Demonstrators Project, Leeds 2007/08

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Case studies and examples of good practice

Lambeth Libraries' work with black and minority ethnic (BME) elders

Lambeth Libraries has had a long relationship with Lambeth's BME elders, not only in providing an appropriate library service (and home delivery service to homebound readers) but through events and activities. In addition to the five weekly over-60s groups and six monthly 'silver surfers' computer clubs – all attended by black elders – Lambeth Libraries has run reminiscence groups, art projects, oral history drop-ins, celebrating age and black history month events. Every week West Norwood Library also hosts a Caribbean lunch club.

In the last couple of years Lambeth Libraries has worked closely with the Make a Difference group at Woodlawns, the West Indian Ex Service Association (WIESA) and the Black Cultural Archive to provide events that help to educate, learn from and bring enjoyment to black elders. With Lambeth Arts, Brixton Library hosted the very successful Sunshine and Memories digital technology project that took elders and school children to Brighton with cameras and examined the contrasting images taken by the participants. In October 2007, 140 elders attended a very popular showing of the 1954 film *Carmen Jones* at West Norwood Library and in May 2008, South Lambeth Library hosted the *Streets Paved with Gold* Windrush play to 120 Black elders as part of the Lambeth Readers and Writers Festival. Lambeth Archives' work on Caribbean genealogy and family trees has attracted a great deal of interest which led to a four-week course on Caribbean family history at Brixton Library and the setting up, with the Black Cultural Archive, of the Caribbean Family History Group.

For the last 20 years Lambeth Libraries has organised Lambeth's Black History Month and every year we celebrate both black achievement and the contribution of black people to Britain – these events are attended by many older people. As part of Black History Month libraries have

organised discussions on the role of West African soldiers in Burma, book launches with a Caribbean film star of the 1960s (Cy Grant), South African quadrille dancing, black history walks and poetry workshops.

Cy Grant is giving a talk on his war memoirs with the Imperial War Museum at Durning Library; Age Concern are helping us re-stage the 1960s Paul Robeson Lambeth Town Hall concert; we are hosting an intergenerational quilt-making project with Lambeth Arts and with Lambeth Archives we are hosting the Caribbean Family History sessions at Minet Library. In November 2008 Lambeth Archives are running an exhibition of work by Sam 'the wheel' on his work in Brixton since the 1950s. In December the Annual Black History Lecture will feature Dr Carole Boyce Davies on Claudia Jones and the West Indian Gazette.

In addition to our work with black elders, Lambeth Libraries works with many other elder groups, including the Asian Elders group at Woodlawns. In 2007 we hosted 100 Asian elders for a special day of film, food and dance at West Norwood Library and we regularly host LGBT elders for coffee mornings and film showings.

Lambeth Libraries and Archives exist to provide access to history and books for learning and enjoyment. We aim to make these services accessible to everyone, to open up histories that have been hidden and to provide books in large print and audio form – or deliver them to the door for those who can't get out. We hope to be able to provide what BME elders want from their library and we constantly review how best to deliver our services. But we provide much more than just books and it's through the interaction with BME elders at events and in weekly groups that we receive the information that helps drive the development of our service.

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Case studies and examples of good practice

Leicester Libraries provision for older people

Leicester Libraries has provided easily accessible services highlighted in its strategy *Better Libraries – Better Lives*[14] . We hope this will build on the track record of success – which we started in 2001 – to combat social exclusion.

Leicester has a relatively young population but has made the provision of services to older people one of its main priorities for the next five years. We have made it easy to join, with no form-filling and no ID required. Over-60s do not pay any library fines or fees.

There are clubs and coffee mornings for over-55s at the Central Lending, Westcotes, Rushey Mead and Age Concern libraries with expansion to other service points happening this year. We have developed reading groups and informal learning slots using computers, family history and information provision. Age Concern is also unique in being one of the only public libraries specifically for older people.

As part of our Home Library Service provision, we have a dedicated minibus that takes 298 mobility impaired people to libraries for social interaction, books and computer use. We also employ 17 volunteers to take books to 156 people in their homes. Community librarians have created conversational English groups – an extension of citizenship classes – at two community libraries for people with limited English.

We have developed some interesting reminiscence projects, for example:

- Calabash, a project run in partnership with Heritage Lottery and Leicester African Caribbean Arts Forum, which collects stories of traditional remedies from the African and Caribbean community to produce a book and interactive website.

- Exploring the legacy of partition 1947-8, a project to gather the memories of the local communities who lived through the upheaval of partition. This led to one of the largest migrations in modern history and the creation of East and West Pakistan. It has a deep resonance for many people now living in Leicester, Leicestershire or Rutland.

[14.] See: **http://www.leicester.gov.uk/your-council--services/education--lifelong-learning/leicesterlibraries-home-page/library-strategy.**

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Case studies and examples of good practice

Hillingdon case studies from Hayes Library citizenship & conversation group

Parvin Poumousa is 59 years old and originally from Iran, where she was a primary school teacher who taught all subjects. She has been in the UK for 6 years and started attending the Hayes Library group in 2007. A friend told her about it because she had been learning about British citizenship in Hayes library. She made contact with the library, where she realised that she would be able to improve her English at the conversation group.

Parvin is an elegant and active lady who generally takes the lead and initiative on the behalf of the Hayes Library group. She is a leading member and a keen educationalist. She has regularly participated in weekly informal English, ICT and community organisations talks/workshops and craft activity sessions intended to promote and encourage English speaking. Parvin feels her English has progressed a lot since attending the sessions and feels more confident within the local community. She is able to use a PC to email and search on the web to find information on various courses – including adult education, ESOL & gardening classes.

Parvin's learning outcomes -

a) She gathered information and pictures about her mother country and was able to do a presentation to the whole group.

b) She now regularly works 1 day a week at the Hillingdon Hospital after attending a workshop on voluntary work presented by HAVS (Hillingdon Association of Voluntary Services) and helps with completing volunteer work forms. Six other members of the Hayes Library

group also complete these forms. Her friend volunteers for home care working in a cancer research charity shop.

Nirmala Sritharan is 48 years old and originally from Sri Lanka. She was a primary school teacher who taught Maths and Tamil. She has lived in the UK for 9 years and has a 6 year-old daughter named Sajika. Initially, Nirmala started attending the group sessions at Yeading Library in 2006, after coming to a WYTL (Welcome To Your Library) event held to engage the local community. This led to a regular weekly Tamil/Sri Lankan group at the Library, involving health discussions, joining and using libraries, language skills and school activities. The driving force for attending Yeading Library was to help her young daughter – who attends the local primary school – with her homework and to improve her own English language skills. Nirmala has taken part since 2006 and believes this has significantly enhanced her life. Plus, it has had an important impact on her English language skills and contributed to the health and well-being of herself and her family. Also, it has led to a two-way benefit in that Nirmala teaches Sajika Tamil writing and Sajika helps her mum with English translation and spelling. Nirmala's learning outcomes –

a) She can now read the Gatehouse English Readers stories, dual language books, use a PC for email and internet searching.

b) She felt sufficiently motivated by attending the library group sessions to enrol for one year at Uxbridge College for an ESOL & Computer Studies course.

c) Nirmala is now able to confidently assist her daughter with her homework.

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Case studies and examples of good practice

Library Services at Home – Birmingham

Library Services at Home (LSAH) aims to reach those who cannot get to their library in person. It has been operating since 1981 and delivers to all areas of the city. The service delivers books and other library materials to around 2000 individuals on a four-weekly cycle and offers bulk loans to around 230 establishments (residential homes, sheltered accommodation and day centres) every two to three months.

In 1996 LSAH commissioned a report called *Library Services at Home for African Caribbean People*, which outlined the research work author Merrise Crooks had undertaken over a sixteen week period with different organisations. These included community projects, churches and bookshops. The report provided a number of recommendations for LSAH to begin its service promotion to African Caribbean elders.

Promotion work began in 1997 with a keyworker at LSAH appointed to look in more detail at the report's recommendations. This was to identify how the community could be best served. It was decided that two main areas needed to be addressed before full promotion could take place:

- stock issues

- links to African Caribbean elders.

Regular stock suppliers were contacted and asked what they held that would be of interest to African Caribbean Elders. Links were made with non-traditional suppliers – such as Good News Broadcasting – and contact set up with librarians in some of the Caribbean islands (eg St. Vincent) as a means of sourcing appropriate material. Contacts were then made with organisations in Birmingham, who supplied services to African Caribbean elders.

A focus group, made up of ten African Caribbean elders, met at LSAH's base to discuss their experiences of reading and choice of preferred material. Suggestions were also made

for ways to promote the service, for example, working closely with churches.

Take-up of the service increased steadily and in 2000, as part of a thank you to organisations who had supported and individuals who had taken up the service, LSAH held an 'open house' to coincide with Black History Month. This comprised a small tour of the workplace, meeting the staff, an exhibition courtesy of Battersea Library *Caribbean 1494 and all that…* and refreshments.

Since then, the keyworker assigned to the recruitment of African Caribbean elders has moved on and the recruitment has become incorporated within the mainstream service.

To celebrate Black History Month in 2003, LSAH undertook an oral history project entitled Memories from the Islands. This project captured the experiences of ten service users, recalling their memories of growing up on different Caribbean islands before moving to England.

Another oral history project was undertaken for Black History Month in 2005. This included six African people now living in Birmingham and was entitled Our Africa. The participants came from Zimbabwe, Nigeria and Sudan.

Work has only begun quite recently on promoting the service to Asian elders. With help from a keyworker with specific language skills, the numbers are gradually increasing – especially within the area of day centres. Stock in several languages is available including fiction and non fiction and a small amount of large print and audio books.

For Black History Month in 2007 an oral history project was organised. This featured seven of LSAH's users with six of the seven participants being Asian elders. The project is entitled Festivals of Our Lives and takes a personal look at Diwali, Christianity, Eid Ul-Fitr and Vaisakhi.

For more information about Birmingham's work, see: http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/libraryservicesathome.bcc

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Case studies and examples of good practice

Portsmouth's work with the Portsmouth Chinese Association

Portsmouth works with the Portsmouth Chinese Association and we support each other's events. This year we had a series of events called Celebrate Beijing. It all started in February with a big event at Portsmouth Guildhall to see in the Chinese New Year. The library itself held Chinese storytelling sessions in three venues at the February half term and in May it hosted a Chinese brush-painting workshop. The culmination was an outdoor event on the Seafront at Southsea, featuring Chinese folk-dancing, singing, crafts and food, Tai Chi, Kung Fu, gymnastics, volleyball and a mini-Olympics with shot, javelin, boccia and long-jump. These events have been targeted at all ages but the brush-painting workshop was run by an elderly member of the Chinese community and particularly attracted older people both Chinese and non-Chinese.

South Tyneside's Older People's Festival – a round up

• During the last festival (October 2007), we engaged with 936 older people in the Central Library and other branches.

• All the libraries held coffee mornings. The one at Central was a health event, in conjunction with Age Concern, who conducted blood pressure checks. Seventy five people attended.

• Our People's Network librarian held Silver Surfer computer taster sessions at central lending and in branches.

• We held another of our hugely popular sell-out nostalgic film shows in the library theatre, (*Singing in the Rain*) with free ice cream from Michael Minchella (150 people attended).

• A Wednesday Heritage Club speaker gave a talk every week throughout the festival.

• Boldon Lane Library hosted a Geordie night, with Tyneside refreshments and entertainment (84 people attended).

• The Home Readers' Service, working with Adult and Community Learning, organised four history bus trips for home-bound older people, to explore the heritage of Jarrow. A guide explained all about the historic settings and lunch was provided at Bede's World (80 people attended in all).

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Case studies and examples of good practice

Developing new joint partnership roles in Cambridgeshire.

"More years in your life and more life in your years"

Library services will need to develop strong partnerships with health, adult social care and local strategic partnerships if they want to preserve older people's quality of life when funding is reduced.

Cambridgeshire's EngAGE Outreach Coordinator is jointly funded by Libraries and Adult Social Care for two years and will look at new services for older people that respond to the care, health and library agendas. The aim is to improve the networks across the agencies and to develop partnership objectives. For example, links have been established with the Cambridgeshire Older People's Reference Group and the Older People's Partnership Board.

We are also developing a programme of library activities for carers.

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Volunteers

In recent years libraries have had an ever-increasing number of volunteers to help expand services to their communities. Many volunteers are themselves older people and we should always recognise the contribution that they make. It enables libraries to offer services to all groups of customers, including children and young people. The presence of volunteers greatly contributes to the community involvement feeling of our activities and can be key to the success of imaginative new services that reach out to both older and younger people.

The recruitment, training, co-ordination and management of volunteers requires time and effort but the resulting contribution can make the difference between being able to provide a service and not having this capacity. Some library authorities have a volunteer coordinator; some manage volunteering through central administration while others manage it locally.

Equality provisions should apply to volunteers: never make assumptions about people and their abilities. Older people can bring a lifetime of life, work and skills experience to volunteering.

Volunteers can become the public face of the library in some activities and their training is important. Staff will also need training so they are able to work effectively with volunteers. Sessions can be group-based or one-to-one but it is important to have a manual that sets out clear guidelines.

Don't overburden willing volunteers. They need recognition for their valuable contribution; this can be through get-togethers, which can also have an information or training element.

There are many examples of successful volunteering by and for older people – many of the activities suggested in A kaleidoscope of activities have a volunteering input. Other ideas are -

• Reading/book group supporters: to help set up and support older people's reading groups, including those in sheltered housing, residential homes and day centres. The supporters should also maintain liaison with the library.

• Libraries in residence: where a collection is delivered to sheltered housing or a care facility, residents may wish to volunteer to promote and look after the collections at their homes. This could enhance the service offered, increase the usage of the collection and offer a basis for initiating further library-related activities at the accommodation – such as author events or reading to residents. Volunteers from outside can also be involved.

• Reading to at-home customers and in residential accommodation: at-home delivery volunteers can be asked if they are willing to read to customers. Users at home can be asked if they are interested in being read to – so volunteers and customers be matched up. Assistance can be offered to volunteers who are interested but feel they need some confidence in reading aloud. Similarly volunteers can be recruited and trained to read in residential accommodation.

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• Literacy one-to-one sessions: to assist older people who have never reached a high level of literacy. Older people can also be volunteer tutors for literacy sessions and can assist older immigrants with English-language practice. This group may be more interested in coming to the library for informal language practice if they think it will be with other older people.

• Volunteers in groups: this could stimulate more older people to join an activity and have a work/support group helping to run events.

• Volunteers to support visually impaired customers: many visually impaired customers are older and there is considerable potential for cross-over in the activities suggested above, not only for at-home activities but also drawing in and including people in library-based activities.

In a competitive volunteer environment, libraries need to make their activities and the welcome they give to volunteers very appealing. Volunteers can be very positive ambassadors for libraries, including helping to recruit further volunteers. One person with a positive experience can attract others.

Some staff have seen the CRB checks as a barrier to recruiting volunteers. In fact, there is no legal requirement to vet all volunteers and a decision to get a CRB check should be based on a thorough risk assessment of the role to be performed and the extent to which this will bring them into contact with children or vulnerable adults. If a CRB check is needed, the CRB will provide this free-of-charge for a volunteer who is 'a person who is engaged in any activity which involves spending time, unpaid (except for travelling and other approved out-of-pocket expenses), doing something which aims to benefit someone (individuals or groups) other than or in addition to close relatives'. For further information see: **http://www.crb.gov.uk/Default.aspx?page=2228**

Case study – Kent Libraries Time2Give programme

Time2Give volunteers (managed by Community Service Volunteers) add value in many ways and some of the most popular activities include:

• computer buddies, helping people who are using library based computers

• researching, collating and indexing local study resources

• helping staff with activities to encourage family use of libraries, such as rhyme-time or study help

• assisting with functions and events, including publicity and displays, or helping out in a practical way, such as in the library garden

• helping people across the community access library services, taking services into the community – such as delivering books to customers who are homebound.

Kent has an excellent website showing volunteer opportunities at each library and including volunteer experiences. Kent Libraries' Time2Give programme was awarded a runner-up prize in the 2008 Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals/Library and Information Show's 'Libraries Change Lives' Award.[15]

[15.] See: **http://www.kent.gov.uk/leisure-and-culture/libraries/joining-a-library/volunteering-libraries.htm**

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Barriers older people may face in using a library – and the challenges that these pose

These have been identified by participants in courses looking at the library and information needs of older people.

- Older people may not be aware of or have access to our full range of services – we need to market and promote them more widely and find ways of working with community and umbrella groups who themselves work with older people.

- Elderly people may also have a lack of understanding of what services libraries now provide (even basic services, such as at-home) and/or their relevance.

- Stereotypes of what older people want from libraries must be tackled. There is often an emphasis on either active older users who come into libraries or frail people that we visit at home: we need to think about both and respond flexibly to their needs. Remember that most people are what they were when they were younger, so their interests are likely to remain as varied.

- Range of provision offered needs to be tailored to meet the needs of all older people.

- Lack of staff awareness of the needs of older people must be addressed.

- Lack of control over services offered – we need to ensure that older people can access information via telephone and ICT.

- Stock limitations. This can be about lack of choice – in large print and availability in other languages, for example – and limitations on the range that is purchased. Current buying emphasis may be on popular 'chick-lit', for example, which may not be of interest to many older people.

Part 4: Practicalities – working with older people, our valued customers

Checklist for library services for older people

This checklist will help you:

• to see how far your library has progressed in having a comprehensive service for older people
• to see where you need more knowledge
• to choose which actions you need to set in motion.

The list is a good instrument for:

• testing your knowledge of the target group
• considering working with local older people's organisations and groups
• checking for gaps in what you offer
• seeing how 'older people friendly' your staff and services are
• beginning the process of benchmarking your service against that of, say, your neighbouring library authorities.

The final section of the checklist focuses on the all-important 'Accessibility – Is Your Library Older People Friendly?'

Inspired by Ouderen in de Picture, with grateful acknowledgement to ProBiblio, The Netherlands.

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Checklist for library services for older people

What we know and do	Where we are now	Where we plan to be in 1 year	Where we are after 1 year
A. THE MAP **We know the number of older people in our area** • 50 - 65 years • 65 - 75 years • 75+ years and their distribution across the library service. **We know to what extent older customers make use of our library** • 50 - 65 years • 65 - 75 years • 75+ years			
B. NETWORKING **We know which organisations in our area are concerned with older people.** **Our library has made and maintains contact with** • all council services for older people • all organisations for older people • care establishments and day centres **We meet at least annually with all the organisations and services above.** **Older people's organisations and groups are encouraged to use the library for activities and meetings.**			

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Checklist for library services for older people

What we know and do	Where we are now	Where we plan to be in 1 year	Where we are after 1 year
C. COMMUNICATIONS AND MARKETING **Many older people's organisations have their own newsletter to make contact with their supporters. The library offers regular news and articles to them.** • Local organisations for older people are on our mailing list and are invited to our activities and events. We regularly assess responses and reactions to our mailings. • The library gives information to staff in local organisations for older people about special services, reading and visual impairment. • The library has displays at older people's fairs and other targeted public events. • Our library actively uses older people's organisations to reach individuals. • The library website refers to the sites of older people's organisations and their websites refer to the library site. • The library finds it important to listen to how older people assess our services. We ask about these views via a customer panel and older people's organisations and we are open to the wishes and suggestions of these potential older customers. • We have made contact with the local media and regularly work with them to promote activities and services targeted at older users.			

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Checklist for library services for older people

What we know and do	Where we are now	Where we plan to be in 1 year	Where we are after 1 year
D. ACTIVITIES We reach older people in care institutions, sheltered housing, day centres and nursing homes through making an attractive and varied collection available to them. • We support staff and activity organisers at care facilities to help the residents access reading and other materials, for example, through visual impairment formats, stimulation and themed collections. • The library initiates and supports activities around 'reading aloud at home' for older people in institutions and in people's own homes. • We make older people aware of the possibilities of reading groups and guides and support the start of reading groups for older people. • The library organises regular computer and internet sessions for older people, including introductory and more advanced sessions and sessions relevant to the advancing technology in the library. • The library promotes intergenerational activities, for example, through activities around children's book weeks and combined activities for old and young for residents of nursing homes and preschool playgroups. These include reading aloud, storytelling, singing and encouraging young people to offer computer support to older people in the library and other settings. • The library has a 'library at home' service for people who cannot come to us. We seek ways of linking at-home readers and extending our at-home services. • We train volunteers about books and reading, using the catalogue and working with older people. • We regularly invite the staff, volunteers and members of older people's organisations to come to the library for an introductory visit. • The library organises book programmes targeted to older adults.			

Part 4: Practicalities – working with older people, our valued customers

Checklist for library services for older people

What we know and do	Where we are now	Where we plan to be in 1 year	Where we are after 1 year
E. COLLECTIONS **Our collection meets the needs and wishes of older people. It includes:** • substantial collections on local history, travel, gardening, hobbies, health, food/nutrition • a contemporary collection of large print books and spoken word books • activity materials for people with dementia. **The library staff know about disability reading organisations (RNIB's Talking Books Service, for example) and we refer people to these.**			
F. STAFF • Recognising and responding to the needs of older people is part of the job responsibilities of all staff. The staff set the tone by being personally attentive to older visitors. • Certain staff have policy development for older people as part of their job responsibility. • All staff receive training on working with older people and are encouraged to make suggestions for improving our services.			

Part 4: Practicalities – working with older people, our valued customers

Is your library older people friendly?

Older people will only use your library on a regular basis if they feel it meets their needs and expectations.

Here are some hints for conducting an audit of your library. Ideally, you will involve older volunteers in both the development process and in actually carrying out the audit. They will have further ideas about what to assess in the library.

Many of the points below are physical and practical but potential older customers will also consider the welcome and assistance they receive from staff.

When you re-arrange the library always consider whether, as a consequence, a new barrier to ease of use might be created.

How accessible is our library?	Where we are now	Where we plan to be in 1 year	Where we are after 1 year
Before you enter the library: • Is there a drop-off point for disabled customers with level and good surfaced access to the library? • Is it clear where the entrance to the library is? • Is there good lighting to get to the entrance? • Does the library organise transport for people who because of age or disability cannot get there by themselves?			
Guiding and notices: • Is there clear and large size guiding to the different areas of the library, so no-one is confused? • Is an enquiry or information desk near the entrance and visible? • Are lifts and escalators clearly signposted, with clear instructions inside them and guidance to different floors? • Are toilets clearly signposted? • Are doors clearly marked with Push or Pull? • Are all notices and leaflets in large/clear print and easy to see?			

Part 4: Practicalities – working with older people, our valued customers

What we know and do	Where we are now	Where we plan to be in 1 year	Where we are after 1 year
Access in the library The library is aware that older people can be influenced by the physical accessibility of the building. Ours is accessible for older people. We know that an attractive collection and furnishings, ambience and staff also play an important role. • Is there sufficient circulating room through the shelving for wheelchairs and people with a walker or trolley? • Are route-ways around the library kept free of obstacles for those with mobility or visual difficulties? • Is there good lighting throughout the building? • Is flooring non-slip, non-glare and free of confusing patterns? • Are there contrasting colours on walls and floors? • Are there contrast strips on steps? • Are the large print and spoken word collections close to the entrance so people do not have to walk far to access them? • Are books and other materials shelved at accessible heights - not too low and not too high - for reading titles and lifting off shelves? • Is subject coding on books clearly visible and understandable? • Are staff always available to assist customers to take books and other materials from shelves? • Are seats firm and high enough? Do arms support people to sit down and get up? Do chairs have legs that stick out and become potential obstacles? • Are seats close to shelving and in good light for reading? • Is seating arranged for comfortable hearing? • Is there a place to sit with a writing surface, other than at a computer? • Is access in the mobile library appropriate for people with mobility or visual difficulties?			

Part 4: Practicalities – working with older people, our valued customers

How accessible is our library?	Where we are now	Where we plan to be in 1 year	Where we are after 1 year
Availability of support equipment • Is all the equipment available publicised and clearly indicated? • Do staff know where the equipment is kept? • Are there pens or pencils of varying thicknesses (to aid dexterity) available at the counter? • Are visual aids such as magnifiers or magnifying sheets available? • Is computer software for magnification, speech recognition, or other support available and are staff trained to assist users? • Is there somewhere for people to park their walking sticks, walkers or wheelchairs when they are in the library? • Are walkers, trolleys and wheelchairs available for use in the building? • Is there a hearing loop, or portable hearing equipment, available at the enquiry desk? And/or is there a system for staff to assist people with hearing difficulties? • Is Typetalk or a Minicom text phone available and are staff trained to use it?			
Facilities • Are cloakrooms and toilets located in easy-to-find places? • Is there clear guidance to the facilities from each floor? • Is there easy male and female toilet identification? • Are the cloakroom and toilet doors easy to open? • Is the toilet floor non-slip? • Is there good lighting in the toilets? • Are there grab rails and accessible hooks in the toilets? • Do the hand-basins have taps with lever handles or work automatically? • Is the water prevented from getting too hot? • Are hand dryers, towels, toilet paper and soap dispensers easy to reach and operate?			
And finally, noise • Are there absorbent materials in the library to absorb sound? • Is there at least one quiet space where older people can relax and enjoy the library?			