

What makes for successful partnership working?

Introduction

One of the issues identified by many library staff in the initial survey was the need to be able to build and sustain partnerships. At some of the pilot courses, therefore, we looked at what could make a successful partnership.

What kinds of partnerships could we have?

- Working directly with children's homes
- Working with Education Departments and individual schools
- Working with other Council departments (eg with the Behaviour Improvement Team)
- Working with other partners (eg Newham works with a local charity)
- Ensuring that partnerships are functional (eg lead to our knowing names of appropriate people to call on, eg the Social Inclusion Officer for Looked-After Children)

We can bring:

- Enthusiasm
- Knowledge of a range of services
- Working with different age groups (eg under-fives)
- Reliability

However, we need to:

- Gain the confidence to instigate, call meetings
- Keep up with developments
- Build on existing partnerships
- Take a "How can we help you? attitude
- Be flexible – respond to what they want – and less bureaucratic
- Plan what we want out of partnerships

From our partners, we would like/hope to get:

- Access to and regular contact with children and young people
- Funding/Finding partners with resources
- Expertise
- Enthusiasm
- A higher profile
- A revised profile (we won't come across as so rule-bound and scary!)
- Access to networks

- A fresh pair of eyes to look at what we are doing
- Consultation/understanding of what non-users' needs are
- Reliability
- Working with non-librarians

We also need to be aware:

- There may be problems where we are relying on others
- However, we need to understand their priorities and work-loads

For the partnerships to work:

- There must be commitment from all partners and at all levels in the organisations
- Ensure that you have top-level agreement/obligation/support
- Have clear aims and objectives
- Delineate responsibilities
- Be clear about what you can offer and what you expect
- Set realistic timescales
- Be flexible and be prepared to compromise
- Good communications
- Face-to-face contact
- Continuity
- Sustainability
- Remember that partnership-working is tricky/hard work
- Maintain your imagination
- Trust and integrity
- Patience, persistence, problem-solving
- Find the person who has authority (or access to it) and can say 'yes'
- Understand each others' cultures
- Choosing someone who either has or has direct access to influence/power
- Ensure that all your peers/staff are on board

October 2004