The Network Newsletter: tackling social exclusion in libraries, museums, archives and galleries

Number 109, May 2010

(formerly published as *Public Libraries & Social Exclusion Action Planning Network Newsletter*, issue 1, May 1999 – issue 29, September 2001)

The Network's Website is at www.seapn.org.uk and includes information on courses, good practice, specific socially excluded groups, as well as the newsletter archive.

Contents List

Did you see …?

Library & Information Update

The April issue[1] includes an article by Margaret Sloan, "Next chapters: public libraries and older adults", which reports on the Australian conference she attended in May 2009, and includes lots of examples of good practice in Australia and New Zealand [pp20-22].

The June issue[2] has a number of interesting articles, including:

- Matthew Mezey "Is 100% digital inclusion the right target?", a report on the National Digital Inclusion Conference [pp18-19]
- "Encouraging people to work together", an interview with Sue Charteris who carried out the 2009 Government Inquiry into the planned library closures in the Wirral [pp28-31]
- Peter Williams and David Nicholas "Why aren't there more black and minority ethnic LIS staff?", the results of a short study carried out by CIBER[3] [see below] [pp47-49].

Adults Learning

The May issue[4] has some interesting articles, including:

- Alastair Thomson "Lifelong learning in challenging times" – in which NIACE's Principal Advocacy Officer outlines the challenges he sees ahead – financial; demographic; technological; environmental; social (including securing social justice and community cohesion)); and democratic [pp12-15]
- Paul Stanistreet "Every day I write the book", an outline of the new Bookbite project[5] [pp28-31].

Tackling social exclusion – Libraries, Museums, Archives and Cultural and Heritage Organisations

"Why aren't there more black and minority ethnic LIS staff?"

As noted above, this article appeared in the June issue of *Update*.

Key issues identified include:

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[1] CILIP *Library & Information Update*, April 2010.
[2] CILIP *Library & Information Update*, June 2010.
[3] For more information about CIBER, see: http://www.ucl.ac.uk/infostudies/research/ciber/.
[4] *Adults Learning* 21 (9) May 2010. For further information see: www.niace.org.uk/adultslearning.
[5] See: www.bookbite.org.uk.

- Qualifications (including the non-recognition of some overseas qualifications)
- Lack of representation on existing public library staffs (and also the lack of materials available in some public libraries, which discourages take-up of library services)
- Cultural differences (eg cultures or societies where there are fewer libraries, and where belonging to or visiting a library is not the norm)
- Language barriers
- Perceived racism
- New arrivals' rights (eg to work in the UK)
- Additional pressures on new arrivals.

Tackling social exclusion – Government, Government Agencies and Local Government

State of the nation report: poverty, worklessness and welfare dependency in the UK

This important new report[6]:

> "… sets out a comprehensive assessment of poverty in the UK at the start of the new Government, establishing a clear 'state of the nation' overview that will be used to inform policy decisions in the months and years ahead as the Government advances its aims of tackling poverty and improving life chances." [p6]

It includes:

> "… a broad range of poverty and deprivation indicators, including income poverty, indebtedness, unemployment, educational and health inequalities, family structure and community breakdown.
>
> Taken together, these measurements set out a clear picture of poverty in the UK. They show that while some progress has been made in some areas, across a wide range of areas the government's performance in tackling poverty and inequality has stalled or deteriorated. This is despite spending billions of pounds on state-led programmes. As a result, poverty and inequality remain a deeply entrenched problem that blights many families and communities across the UK." [p6]

The report begins by highlighting some key statistics, for example:

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[6] *State of the nation report: poverty, worklessness and welfare dependency in the UK*. Cabinet Office, 2010. Available to download as a pdf (1340 kb) from: http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/410872/web-poverty-report.pdf.

- New analysis shows that 5.3 million people in the UK suffer from multiple disadvantage
- 1.4 million people in the UK have been on an out-of-work benefit for nine or more of the last 10 years
- Income inequality in the UK is now at its highest level since comparable statistics began in 1961
- Social mobility in Britain is, in terms of sons' earnings relative to their fathers', worse than in the USA, France, Germany, Spain, Sweden, Canada, Finland and Denmark.
- A higher proportion of children grow up in workless households in the UK than in almost any other EU country.
- A higher proportion of young people in the UK are not in work, education or training than in almost any other EU country.
- People living in the poorest neighbourhoods in England will, on average, die seven years earlier than people living in the richest neighbourhoods.
- Health inequalities, as proxied by life expectancy at birth, are higher now than they were in the 1970s.
- The gap in educational attainment between children from rich and poor backgrounds remains persistently high.
- The gap in income between the middle and the bottom has not improved in the past decade and on some measures appears to have increased [taken from pp6-7].

In relation to income poverty and inequality, the report draws together data to show that:

- "severe poverty has increased since 2004/05;
- almost one in ten people (8%) live in persistent poverty, measured as spending three years or longer out of the past four years in relative poverty;
- the proportion of the population living in relative poverty is higher in the UK than in many other European countries, including France, Germany and Portugal; and
- over the past decade, personal debt reached record levels – and UK household debt is among the highest of any developed country." [p7]

The report also looks at worklessness, for example:

- "More than one in four working-age adults – 10.6 million people – in the UK do not work.
- The UK has one of the highest rates of workless households in the EU, with 4.8 million working-age people living in a household in which no one of working-age is in work.
- The UK has one of the highest rates of children living in workless households in the EU, with 1.9 million children living in workless households …

- Over 2.5 million people are unemployed, including around 940,000 16–24-year-olds, up from around 650,000 in 1997. The unemployment rate for 16–17-year-olds is now 35%.
- Certain groups are particularly likely to be out of work. For example, over a third of Black African households are not in work, while over half of disabled people are not in work. " [p9]

The report also spells out key issues around health disadvantage, including, for example:

- "In England, people living in the poorest neighbourhoods will, on average, die seven years earlier than people living in the richest neighbourhoods." [p12]

and educational disadvantage, including:

- "Some 10% of the working-age population have no qualifications, which rises to 24% for disabled adults.
- International benchmarks suggest that the proportion of adults without upper secondary levels of qualifications in the UK is above the OECD average, with the UK also performing relatively poorly in many other studies of attainment.
- The attainment gap for children in care has widened since 2001, with the proportion of children in care achieving five GCSEs or equivalent at grade A*–C rising from 8% in 2001 to 14% in 2008, compared with an overall rise from 48% to 65%.
- Just 1% of children eligible for free school meals go to a university in the Russell Group, compared with 7% of non-free school meal students.
- Of 81,000 pupils on free school meals, only 45 went to Oxbridge ..." [p12]

There is also investigation of the effects of:

- Family structure (including teen births)
- Loneliness and the lack of social capital
- Poor housing and local environment
- Multiple disadvantage:

  "In 2010, multiple disadvantage is a significant problem in the UK. Over the past decade, there has been no demonstrable progress in reducing the numbers of people who suffer multiple disadvantage. Over 60% of the indicators in one of the main annual surveys show either no progress or a trend in the wrong direction. New analysis shows 5.3 million people (11%) suffer from multiple disadvantage in the UK, and 3.7 million people do so persistently.

There is strong evidence that multiple disadvantage is intergenerational: 27% of children from families experiencing six or more parent-related disadvantages also have three or more disadvantages, compared with only 4% of those with no parent-related disadvantages." [p13]

This is a major piece of work which the new Government will be using to shape its future policies and priorities:

"We will dismantle these barriers and take action to ensure that everyone has the best possible chance to fulfil their potential and leave poverty behind." [p6]

Tackling social exclusion – Other Agencies

Injustice

This is an important new resource[7] from Daniel Dorling, Professor of Human Geography at the University of Sheffield, which complements the research in *The spirit level*[8] and the Marmot Review[9].

There is a full review by John Vincent, along with further details of the book, on the Policy Press website[10].

Disability issues – Other Agencies

Your Reading Choices – a new resource to help people with sight loss to continue or renew their enjoyment of reading

"I am experiencing sight loss but I need to go on reading; it's such an important part of my life." Milly aged 64

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[7] Daniel Dorling. *Injustice: why social inequality persists.* Policy Press, 2010 (ISBN: 9781847424266).

[8] Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett. *The spirit level: why more equal societies almost always do better.* Penguin Allen Lane (978-1-846-14039-6). There is a brief review in *The Network Newsletter* 104, December 2009. This title is also available to buy via The Network website bookshop – see: http://www.seapn.org.uk/shop.asp?page_id=79.

[9] *Fair society, healthy lives: the Marmot Review – strategic review of health inequalities in England post-2010.* The Marmot Review, 2010 (ISBN: 978-0-9564870-0-1). Available to download as a pdf (25000 kb) from: http://www.ucl.ac.uk/gheg/marmotreview/FairSocietyHealthyLives. There is a brief review in *The Network Newsletter* 105, January 2010.

[10] See: http://www.policypress.co.uk/display.asp?K=9781847424266&.

"I haven't been much of a reader in the past but now that sight loss means that I can't do some of the things I used to enjoy I'd like to use my time to catch up on some of the books I'd always meant to read."
George aged 59

What would help Milly and George, and the many others like them, to find their way through the range of possible formats and the list of organisations that could help them to continue or renew their enjoyment of reading?

That question was the starting point for the development of a new online resource *Your Reading Choices*. We imagined having a conversation with Milly about the formats she can manage (enlarged print, audio) or would be willing to explore (online or e-books); asking George whether he wanted to read books for personal leisure or work purposes; and finding out more about their interests and preferences in order to give them the best choices of where to go next.

The "conversation" has been encapsulated into a series of 30 questions (mostly answered with a simple Yes or No) that takes about 10 minutes to complete. At the end of the process a Personal Reading Plan, specific to the individual, is produced that identifies the key organisations that can provide resources or further information and help. An individual can complete *Your Reading Choices* or a family member, a friend, rehab worker or librarian can do it on their behalf.

Your Reading Choices is part of Reading Sight www.readingsight.org.uk a joint project between RNIB, Share the Vision, The Society of Chief Librarians and supported by the Ulverscroft Foundation. We are all too aware of the limited choice of reading in alternative formats. At the same time as supporting Right to Read and any other ways to create awareness and lobby for this to change we need to find ways to help people make the best of the current situation.

Your Reading Choices will be launched on 15 June at the RNIB National Library Service as part of Make a Noise in Libraries fortnight. We are already working on a version of *Your Reading Choices* for children and young people. This will be launched in September.

Please have a look at *Your Reading Choices* on Reading Sight and let us know what you think about it. Milly and George found it useful but we know with refinements over time that it will be even better.

For further information please contact Pat Beech, Manager RNIB National Library Service, 0161 355 2005 or pat.beech@rnib.org.uk.

Pat Beech

Abbreviations and acronyms

CIBER = Centre for Information Behaviour and the Evaluation of Research
CILIP = Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals
LIS = Library and Information Science/Service
NIACE = National Institute of Adult Continuing Education
RNIB = Royal National Institute of Blind People

This Newsletter was compiled by John Vincent, and all items are written by him, unless otherwise stated. Please send any comments or items for the next issue to:

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