

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

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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.

2006

With very best wishes to all our readers for 2006!

Did you see ...?

40th anniversary of the passing of the Race Relations Act

You will probably have seen media coverage of this¹, but, just in case you missed the CRE exhibition (“40 years of law against racial discrimination”), they have produced a ‘microsite’ and leaflet², looking at key events over the last 40 years.

The Independent article also has a timely reminder that there is still much work to be done – for example:

- Unemployment (men)
 - White: 5.6%
 - African Caribbean: 14.9%
 - Pakistani: 13.6%
 - Bangladeshi: 15.9%

- Black and ethnic minority people form 25% of current prison population.

¹ For example, Nigel Morris and Charlotte Bailey “Forty years on, how the race laws have fared” *The Independent* 8 December 2005, p11.

² Available at: <http://www.cre.gov.uk/publs/new.html>.

“Mainstreaming Equality”

CILIP's *Gazette* 16 December 2005 carries a short report³ of the Career Development Group's conference, held at the University of Leicester in November, which included sessions by Isobel Ashford (EMMLAC), Ayub Khan (Warwickshire), Kath Owen (Nottinghamshire) and John Pateman (Lincolnshire).

Local Area Agreements

A bit unsure about the role of LAAs? In the “Opinion” column⁴ in the latest *Update*, Michael Clarke (Director of the LLDA) outlines their purpose and why it is vital that libraries get involved.

"All together now"

Just in case you missed it, *The Guardian* has just published⁵ a very useful piece on multicultural Britain, which is also available on their website, including brief background information on different settled communities.

“Nice guys and gals win”

Finally, in another interesting piece⁶ for *Management Today*, Richard Reeves (of “Making Slough Happy” fame) suggests that it's time we re-evaluate the word ‘nice’ – he says:

“... short-term effectiveness may be greater among those who put niceness last. But in the long run, winning the support and loyalty of staff and creating networks of well-disposed people requires a measure of kindness. It is high time to take the stigmas away from the ‘nice’ label. It may once have been true that being nice was dumb. Now, though, it is the nasties who are the numbskulls.”

Mayor's Report into Access to Culture for Disabled People

Last year, Shape⁷ was commissioned by the Mayor's Office to carry out research into access to culture for disabled and deaf people in London, and their report has just been published⁸.

³ Alison Charlesworth “Mainstreaming Equality” *Library + Information Gazette* 16 December 2005, p3.

⁴ Michael Clarke “Local area agreements: a shotgun wedding or a marriage of equals?” *Update* 4 (12) December 2005, p17.

⁵ Leo Benedictus “All together now” *The Guardian* G2, 23 January 2006. Available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/g2/story/0,,1692835,00.html>. Thanks to Shiraz Durrani for alerting me to this.

⁶ Richard Reeves “Nice guys and gals win” *Management Today* January 2006, p27.

⁷ Shape – “disabled and deaf people and the arts”, further information from: <http://www.shapearts.org.uk/>.

The survey was of a sample of London organisations only, but, from this, Shape have drawn out some “factors for success”, including:

- Partnerships and networking
- Information
- Training
- Policy and governance.

They have also highlighted key areas where there could be more cross-sectoral working, including;

- Monitoring
- Workforce development
- Information and guidance
- Concessions and ticketing
- Transport
- Training
- Networking.

As the email from Shape says:

“The process of the research brought together Sport England, Arts Council London, the GLA, ALM and the Association of London Government. For the very first time these bodies worked together to share knowledge and experiences around access, inclusion and diversity. We hope to be able to continue to develop these strategic relations for the benefit of disabled and deaf users in the future.”

“Welcome to Your Library”

Helen Carpenter’s case study on “Welcome to Your Library” for the Improvement and Development Agency’s website, IDeA Knowledge, has just been published on their “Community Cohesion” page⁹.

This is really putting the work that libraries do with refugees and asylum-seekers on the map!

Engaging refugees and asylum seekers

In 2003, National Museums Liverpool, Leicester City Museums Service, Salford Museums & Art Gallery, and Tyne & Wear Museums developed a

⁸ Melita Armitage and Michèle Taylor. *The Mayor of London’s disability and culture research*. GLA, 2005 (ISBN: 1-85261-804-3). Available to download as a pdf from: <http://www.london.gov.uk/mayor/culture/docs/disability-culture.pdf>.

⁹ See: <http://www.idea-knowledge.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelId=79005>.

project to explore how museums could contribute to supporting refugees and asylum-seekers, and, from this work, produced a “best practice guide”¹⁰.

“This guide is designed to support museum and gallery staff wishing to reach out to asylum seekers and refugees. It suggests approaches to making contacts, developing appropriate activities, coping with language differences, evaluation and sustainability ...” [frontispiece]

It begins by listing “the essential tools” (ie attributes such as patience, persistence and tenacity; initiative; etc), and then works through:

- Why work with refugees and asylum seekers?
- Making contact with refugees & asylum seekers
- What do refugees & asylum seekers need?
- Planning an event
- Evaluation
- Sustainability.

This is an immensely useful, practical guide which, in the same way that the pilot phase of “Welcome to Your Library” did, draws on the work of the project officers in the different services to test out methods of working, and pooling good practice.

Highly recommended.

Culture shock ...

Starting with the statement that “the world is right in the middle of a swirling debate about culture: about who ‘we’ are; about ‘our’ way of life” (Summary, p1), these documents¹¹ investigate links between citizenship, cohesion and identity, and then look at the role that museums do – and should – play in this.

Culture shock was created by the Campaign for Learning through Museums and Galleries [clmg], drawing on the expertise of a range of organisations, including The Network’s members Jocelyn Dodd (RCMG) and Sally MacDonald (Petrie Museum).

It has been produced as two separate documents, a Summary and the Main Report. The Summary document runs briefly through the main points:

¹⁰ Karen Holmes *et al.* *Engaging refugees and asylum seekers: a best practice guide for museums and galleries*. [no publication details available, c2005].

¹¹ *Culture shock: tolerance, respect, understanding ... and museums: Summary*. clmg, 2005.

Culture shock: tolerance, respect, understanding ... and museums: Main Report. clmg, 2005. Both documents are available to download as pdf^s from: <http://www.clmg.org.uk/html/publications.html>. For further information, contact clmg, Gooseham Mill, Gooseham, Bude, Cornwall EX23 9PQ. Tel: 01288 331615; email: directorsoffice@clmg.org.uk.

- What's the problem?
- What have museums got to do with this?
- This is not a culture-free zone ("No one is culture-free ...")
- So what? (which introduces the two key ideas for ways forward: Listening/Collecting and Story-telling/Exhibiting)
- Are you talking to me? (which argues that we are not talking about someone else's museum ...)

The idea of the two documents is to use the Summary as the 'headline arguments' which are then developed in the Main Report: this also includes definitions of key terms; examples of work that is going on in museums across the world; "reality checks" which test claims to ensure that the case for museums is not being over-argued; and practical hints – "DIY tips and wise counsel from people who've tried this kind of work." [Main Report, p3].

The Main Report also develops the two key ideas as part of a "jigsaw" approach that museums might adopt:

Listening/Collecting could include:

- Personal museums
- Community collecting
- International outreach
- One-World (the sharing of stories across the world).

Storytelling/Exhibiting could include:

- Culture boxes (a programme of cultural welcome material for new arrivals in the UK)
- Culture gateways ("effectively using the vast wall and floor space at ports and airports to tell the story of people flows across the world at different times in history and today ..." [p16])
- Cultural windows (eg exhibitions in high street shop windows)
- Blockbuster exhibitions.

These are extremely important documents, challenging existing practice and setting out a vision for culturally-engaged museums of the future – the arguments clearly apply to archives and libraries too.

Highly recommended.

Transitions ...

Following publication of *Breaking the cycle*¹² in 2004, the SEU has been developing the work programme, “Improving Services, Improving Lives”, and the latest report¹³ from this work has just been published.

Transitions looks at the issues facing 16-25 year-olds with complex needs, and starts by identifying some shocking facts, for example:

- Over 1 million young people in the UK aged 16-24 are not in education, employment or training
- Suicide is the cause of a quarter of the deaths among 16-24 year-old men.

It looks at young people and disadvantage (eg lack of employment; homelessness; health and disability; crime; the effects of having been in social care); and then examines some of the factors that can compound disadvantage (such as rural disadvantage; sexuality; ethnic minority groups).

The report then looks at the thinking and behaviour of young adults (with particular emphasis on some areas of concern – education and lifeskills, work and training, drugs and alcohol, anti-social behaviour, and therapy and counselling).

From the research carried out for this report, the SEU also identifies two key problem areas which need urgent attention:

- Age boundaries which may mean that services are not available to young people at certain important stages in their lives
- The need for holistic services and the role of the “trusted adult”.

Finally, it looks at the principles of service delivery for young adults in transition – these are:

- Actively managing the transition from youth to adult services
- Taking thinking and behaviour into account, and building on these
- Involving young adults in designing and delivering services
- Giving effective information about services, and sharing information between services
- Offering young people a trusted adult who can both challenge and support them.

¹² *Breaking the cycle: taking stock of progress and priorities for the future – a report by the Social Exclusion Unit*. ODPM, 2004. See the Network Newsletter 34, September 2004 for a review of this.

¹³ *Transitions: young adults with complex needs: a Social Exclusion Unit report*. ODPM, 2005 £12.00 (ISBN: 1-85112-811-5). Further information from: <http://www.socialexclusion.gov.uk/page.asp?id=563>, where the report can also be downloaded as a pdf (893 Kb).

It also includes a summary of action points and which Government department is taking the lead on each.

The report is supported by some material available online only: a literature review¹⁴, a summary of the consultation and focus groups¹⁵, and supplementary case studies (which I couldn't get to download!).

Deputy Prime Minister's Award for Sustainable Communities 2005

The four finalists for the Deputy Prime Minister's Award for Sustainable Communities have just been announced¹⁶. The Award recognises projects and initiatives that contribute to making towns, cities and communities, including those in rural areas, better places in which to live and work. They pay tribute to those people whose commitment and enthusiasm are making a significant contribution towards the building of thriving and successful communities.

The four finalists are:

- The Regeneration of Attwood Green, Birmingham
- Springhill Co-housing Community, Stroud, Gloucestershire
- A New Deal for Braunstone, Leicester
- From Survival to Sustainability: Taking Pride In Gravesham (part of the Thames Gateway), Gravesend, Kent.

The Braunstone scheme – coordinated by the Braunstone Community Association – was set up to deliver an integrated programme to tackle poor health, low educational attainment and skill levels, high crime rates and unemployment levels, and a lack of physical infrastructure.

The ODPM's press release announces that:

"Through joined up working with statutory agencies, voluntary sector organisations, and local residents, the programme has implemented more than 90 projects. Key transformational schemes include a leisure centre, a library and community centre and a dedicated youth house. The programme has also developed initiatives relating to young people and health. The FAB Fit and Active Braunstone project is particularly inspirational. A further venture has led to the total transformation of the Six Streets area from a rundown crime-ridden neighbourhood with high

¹⁴ Gill Jones. *The thinking and behaviour of young adults (aged 16-25): literature review for the Social Exclusion Unit*. SEU, 2005. Available as a pdf (358 Kb) at: <http://www.socialexclusion.gov.uk/downloadaddoc.asp?id=794>.

¹⁵ *Transitions: young adults with complex needs – consultation with young adults and practitioners: summary*. SEU, 2005. Available as a pdf (171 Kb) at: <http://www.socialexclusion.gov.uk/downloadaddoc.asp?id=789>.

¹⁶ See: <http://www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1002882&PressNoticeID=2059>.

levels of vacancy to a totally refurbished area that now boasts a tenant waiting list.”

Good to see a library at the heart of such a scheme!

HIV related stigma and discrimination: action plan

The DOH has just published a consultation document¹⁷, seeking views on its Action Plan.

The document suggests that Primary Care Trusts, Commissioners of HIV services, voluntary sector organisations and others can help to fight HIV discrimination by taking a range of actions, including the following:

- Embedding an awareness of HIV stigma and discrimination in all HIV related activities
- Actively monitoring and challenging HIV discrimination
- Prioritising programmes that promote the self-regard and self-image of people with HIV
- Involving people with HIV in the policy making, planning and commissioning processes
- Review and update professional guidance, codes of practice and other relevant publications in respect of HIV.

The consultation closes on 31 March 2006.

Remembering slavery in 2007

The Heritage Lottery Fund has recently published this “guide to resources for heritage projects”¹⁸.

As they state in the introduction:

“We want to encourage community-based organisations and heritage institutions, working in partnership, to apply for HLF funding to support projects inspired by this important anniversary ...” [p4]

The guide includes:

- Ideas for projects
- Making a successful funding application

¹⁷ Available at:

http://www.dh.gov.uk/Consultations/LiveConsultations/LiveConsultationsArticle/fs/en?CONTENT_ID=4126402&chk=qOdBVE.

¹⁸ *Remembering slavery in 2007: a guide to resources for heritage projects*. HLF, 2005. Available to download as a pdf (1 Mb) from:

www.hlf.org.uk/English/PublicationsAndInfo/AccessingPublications/OtherPublications.htm. Hard copies (and copies in large print, in Welsh, and on audio-cassette in English) are available from 020 7591 6042.

- Resources – divided into:
 - Libraries – public and specialist
 - Archives and Record Offices
 - Museums
 - Historic houses and sites
 - Other organisations (eg Black and Asian Studies Association)
 - Websites and other resources
 - Specific resources for work with young people
 - Walks and trails
 - Publications.

Even if you do not wish to make an application to HLF, this is a very valuable guide to resources. Highly recommended.

Literacy and social inclusion: the handbook

This handbook¹⁹ has been produced by Viv Bird and Rodie Akerman as a result of the work undertaken during the three-year “Literacy and Social Inclusion project”. It offers practical advice for developing responses to the issues identified during the project.

Chapter 1 describes how to set about developing a community literacy strategy (including a step-by-step guide to developing a collaborative way of working in the literacy field); and also includes a 10-point checklist, intended outcomes for individuals, families and communities; and a list of some national literacy promotions.

Chapter 2 argues the case for developing a community literacy strategy to support the implementation of *Every child matters*.

Chapters 3-8 take different topics – as below – and, for each, set out the context and key research evidence, Government policies which relate to literacy and social inclusion, and case studies:

- Early years
- Primary schools
- Secondary sector
- Post-16 sector
- Cultural sector and sport
- Criminal justice system.

There are useful pointers from chapter to chapter in order to link themes and show how case studies may fulfil a number of different functions.

This is a very valuable, practical guide – highly recommended.

¹⁹ Viv Bird and Rodie Akerman. *Literacy and social inclusion: the handbook*. Basic Skills Agency, 2005. £5.00 (ISBN: 1-900904-03-9), BSA reference no: A1861. Copies available from the Basic Skills Agency, Admail 524, London WC1A 1BR. Tel: 0970 600 2400; fax: 0870 600 2401; email: orders@basic-skills.co.uk.

Tackling the roots of racism ...

Reena Bhavnani, Heidi Safia Mirza and Veena Meetoo from Middlesex University's Centre for Racial Equality Studies were commissioned by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation "to map the causes of racism and to review policy interventions aiming to combat it" (p1).

In this ground-breaking book²⁰, they investigate different definitions of racism; look at how we might define a successful intervention; and then work through issues surrounding racism and the law, equality at work, and accessing services. Finally, they look at multicultural interventions, and review lessons for success, and whether any of these are actually having any impact on racism.

The book has an extensive bibliography, and, as an appendix, brief case studies of some successful interventions from across the world. It also includes a very useful summary appendix, showing the development of legislative approaches to tackling racism; and a glossary.

The discussions are informative and draw together a lot of developments, especially across the UK; those relating to changes in philosophy/policy (eg in relation to equal opportunities; social cohesion) are particularly useful. The section on successful interventions at a national level (eg in New Zealand and Canada) shows ways forward at a global level too.

Although mostly written in a straightforward style, occasionally the book is hard-going, for example:

"This 'intersectionality' is not problematised in the official equalities debate. Intersectionality is overlooked within the systematic rationale of the legal discourse that artificially separates out our combined racial and gendered and other identities ..." [p72]

Their final conclusion seems pessimistic, particularly given the analysis in the rest of the book:

"What the [World] Conference [Against Racism, Durban, 2001] illustrated and indeed as do the contents of this book, is that there is no one definition of racism, no one history of racism, and no one cause of racism. The multiple, situated and changing nature of racism in different times and places means it is impossible to find one ideal successful intervention which addresses the roots and reproduction of racism." [p161]

Whilst this may well be true – and the book argues persuasively that it is – we need to start to find ways of tackling root causes urgently. I'd like to end this review with a sentence from earlier in the book:

²⁰ Reena Bhavnani, Heidi Safia Mirza and Veena Meetoo. *Tackling the roots of racism: lessons for success*. The Policy Press, 2005 £15.99 (ISBN: 1-86134-774-X).

“Rather than search for the key to success, what has emerged in this book are underlying themes which direct us to areas where interventions may have an impact on the root causes of racism.” [p159]

It is for these that I'd recommend your reading this book.

Children's Centres partnerships in the West Midlands

ContinYou has set up a partnership across six local authorities to share good practice between extended schools.

The local authorities are Dudley, Walsall, Sandwell, Worcestershire, Staffordshire and Coventry. Children's Centres are to be located on school sites and will have a close relationship with extended schools.

The aim of the ContinYou partnership is to find the most effective ways to improve working relations, share and pool experiences and to promote greater integration between extended schools and children's centres.²¹

Abbreviations and acronyms

ALM London = Archives, Libraries and Museums London
CILIP = Chartered Institute for Library & Information Professionals
clmg = Campaign for Learning through Museums and Galleries
CRE = Commission for Racial Equality
DOH = Department of Health
EMMLAC = East Midlands Museums, Libraries and Archives Council
GLA = Greater London Authority
IDeA = Improvement & Development Agency
LAAs = Local Area Agreements
ODPM = Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
RCMG = Research Centre for Museums and Galleries, University of Leicester
SEU = Social Exclusion Unit

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²¹ Taken from the Our Partnership website at: <http://www.ourpartnership.org.uk/newspub/story.cfm?id=396&sid=151>. Thanks to the Our Partnership e-newsletter (117, 13 January 2006) for alerting me to this.

Reading Together
– working with Dads and their families
Linking Libraries, HMP Lincoln and Bishop Grosseteste
College

“Reading Together” is a Paul Hamlyn Foundation-funded project which began in April 2005, managed by Lincolnshire Library Service, and running in HMP Lincoln in partnership with Bishop Grosseteste College.

HMP Lincoln is a category B closed prison currently housing 490 prisoners with a projected increase to over 700 by 2006. Because it is a Category B prison there are restrictions on visiting rights. This can be difficult for young families, whose access to their fathers is limited. It is recognised that where there is no existing culture of reading within families, it is unlikely to be passed to succeeding generations. Therefore, the project aims to create such a culture by encouraging fathers and their children to share a reading experience.

“Reading Together” aims to make a difference for prisoners and their families. The principal aim of the project is to encourage fathers, grandfathers and stepfathers in Lincoln Prison to maintain links with their children through reading and sharing books. Evidence shows that many men in prison are not comfortable with reading and writing: in 2000, 50% of prisoners had poor reading skills and 80% had poor writing skills. Therefore, a major strand of the project is to use creative writing, storytelling and drama to encourage the men and their families to venture into reading and writing.

A “Reading Together” children’s collection has been established in the prison library so that Dads can choose their books. A duplicate copy of the book is then sent to the library closest to his family. This process encourages the use of both the prison and the public library. The “Reading Together” Project Officer’s job is to make contact with the families and help them to join their local library and access the books that Dad has chosen for them.

Dads and children exchange letters about the books, with ideas and help from the prison Writer in Residence, the Librarian and the Project Officer. Once 3 books have been shared together, the children receive a goody bag of books, tapes & activities. With help from the Bishop Grosseteste College students and library staff, the “Reading Together” Project runs storytelling and reading-related activities in the prison visits area, as well as in local libraries.

The Project Manager started in post in April 2004 and began working to fulfil the following aims and objectives:

- To promote positive partnerships between the Public Library, HMP Lincoln and the local Higher Education Institution, Bishop Grosseteste College.
- To use creative writing as a means of encouraging reading

- To enhance creativity in the teaching experience in the prison classroom, thus adding to the good work done by teaching staff, particularly in those courses focused on communication skills
- To encourage prisoners and their families to share a reading experience
- To encourage the use of both the prison and the public library
- To foster a continuing culture of reading in prisoners and their families
- To build positive relationships within families through shared activity

Although the project has only been running for 9 months, there are already some positive outcomes to report. One Dad recently recruited to “Reading Together” is a non-reader. He is getting help to read and is keen to improve his reading so that he can share books with his children. Two other Dads are keen to take part as they can see that it may help restore the broken communication with their children, some partners do not want to bring children to visit their Dads, and, even with quite a short sentence, family links begin to be broken down. One of these Dads who is a good reader and recognizes the importance of sharing books and family time has offered to be a peer mentor to other prisoners if his own family do not respond. One further Dad who is on suicide watch is finding “Reading Together” a real help in taking his mind off things and giving him something positive to focus on, he is constantly drawing characters to keep himself occupied.

The first group of Dads have families that live across the county – Skegness, Gainsborough, Grantham, Boston, Ermine and Boutham. These are the libraries that have already been involved. Some of the families are already members of the library. In order to make this project work, staff have to be both broadminded and supportive. In some cases it means accepting a certain level of loss, bearing in mind that in the long term we may have contributed to breaking the cycle of not sharing books and helped create a confident life long reader.

1. Benefits for prisoners and their family

The families who have taken part in “Reading Together” so far have benefited in a number of different ways. They have given some very positive feedback. The most significant factor for all concerned is the positive effect on the father/child relationships. In most cases, this in turn has had a positive influence on the relationship of the men with their partners as some of the dads viewed “Reading Together” as a lifeline in a broken-down relationship. Partners have been encouraged by the dads making the effort to work with their children. The dads have felt empowered that they can make a difference to their children’s development despite the separation they are experiencing. Children have enjoyed this very special and personal attention from their dads.

Quotes from Mums and Dads:

‘I will use the library for the internet and to get fitness books’ (a dad on his release)

‘It has helped us understand more about kids reading’

'We go to book group in the library every Tuesday now'

'Sally loves getting letters from her dad. It has helped her keep contact as we find it hard to afford to visit him very frequently'

'She reads books to him now, which she never did before because she thought he was too young. She's bought him some of the Maisy books because he liked them so much.' (A Dad speaking of his partner)

2. Benefits for Lincolnshire County Council and Libraries

As Lincolnshire Library Service takes its first steps towards delivering a Needs-Based Library Service, this project is demonstrating to staff the significance of social exclusion and the value of work combating it. John Pateman, Head of Libraries in Lincolnshire, says:

"Reading Together is an inspiring project which will help to deliver some of the council's new aims, particularly enabling access and promoting diversity. The project is also directly in line with the library service's strategic objectives of inclusion, learning and regeneration. Reading Together is a good example of what a Needs Based Library Service will look like in the future – with a focus on new ways of working, outreach and community engagement"

Rachel Robbs, Community Outreach Officer based at Boston Library, says:

"It brought home to us the importance of working with some of the hardest to reach groups in our communities. Although some of the children involved were already library members their parents weren't and it has encouraged them to join and get more involved with their children's reading"

"Reading Together" will also be invaluable in helping to deliver the Council's new aims and objectives encapsulated and presented within the term:

Lincolnshire LEADS

- enrich Lifestyle
- achieve Excellence
- improve Access
- promote Diversity
- increase Security

Social exclusion has been defined as 'what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown'. Finding joined-up solutions to tackle these problems and improve people's lives is a priority for both prisons and libraries. Working to solve one problem can often help with others as is reflected in both the Generic Learning Outcomes (attached) and the MLA's newly emerging

Generic Social Outcomes which Lincolnshire will be piloting along with several other authorities.

Through “Reading Together”, staff have an increased understanding and an awareness of how disrupted family life can be when a family member receives a custodial sentence also what prison is like from the inside. Staff have begun to take on new skills and have realised that libraries are able to contribute to shared aims and objectives through close and effective partnership working.

3. Benefits for HMP Lincoln

HMP Lincoln came on board with this project at a time of change. It is impossible to overstate the significance of a major disturbance which rocked the prison three years ago. Staff morale and confidence plummeted. Reluctant and resistant attitudes of prison staff towards change hardened. Says Pauline Tait, Head of Learning and Skills at the Prison:

“The Reading Together project has brought much needed funding to an under-resourced prison serving a predominantly rural area. It has been a cause for celebration and a vote of confidence in Lincoln Prison”.

Directly because of “Reading Together”, the prison was invited by the DfES to pilot a Family Learning Pathfinder Project. This project funded multi-disciplinary workshops for frontline staff and for prisoners to raise awareness of family learning. The Basic Skills Agency and the LEA Adult and Community Education team delivered these sessions.

Small but significant steps are now being made by frontline staff to make things happen. Without this, major strides made by senior management will falter.

“Reading Together” has helped to position work with the children and families of offenders at strategic level and to appreciate the necessity of repairing and sustaining these relationships to reduce re-offending.

4. Benefits for Bishop Grosseteste College

The experience has been extremely useful to the students and staff of the College in a number of ways. We have had an opportunity to learn about the particular issues involved in taking a piece of work into a high security prison. We have also been challenged to consider the appropriateness of material for this particular audience. The students’ perception of prison and prisoners has been challenged in a number of ways and they have had an opportunity to reflect upon their personal opinions of the justice system. Ruth Sayers, Programme Leader for BA (Hons) Drama in the Community, says:

“The students have had an opportunity to work in a real community environment that is usually ‘out of bounds’ and have been able to talk about issues with the prisoners in a way that is probably unique, through the medium of theatre and use of role. This distancing device allows people to reveal their values and attitudes without making

themselves personally vulnerable. We hope that the prisoners found this a useful and empowering device, too”.

It is clear from all participants so far that “Reading Together” is fulfilling a need in prison for men to be able to talk about their families and feel empowered to still be involved in an active way with their children. The mums and carers have felt encouraged by the dads’ efforts to work at their relationships with their children. Most families have reported that the children have been really excited to have special letters from their dad and to collect the books that their dad has chosen specially for them, at their local library.

“Reading Together” has supported the moves in HMP Lincoln to create better provision for families. It has raised the profile of Lincolnshire Libraries locally and is also providing Bishop Grosseteste College drama students with a challenging and stimulating environment in which to learn and practice their skills. The prisoners who have participated so far have been very positive in their evaluation and feel that the scheme is helping them maintain links with their families.

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