

## **Library support for homeless people: responses to a call for information, October 2016**

### **Archives West Midlands**

Recently as part of an Arts Council funded project called Strong Rooms run by Archives West Midlands in Rugby and Coventry, Culture Coventry worked with Crisis, the homeless charity to deliver an archives-inspired arts project. Three participants lasted the whole 4 workshop programme and, as a result, created and performed their own poetry, gaining a huge amount of confidence and a connection with the story of the city through the collections.

In Rugby, the Hope 4 centre, a local homeless charity, gave us access to their facilities. Their generosity and support gave us real confidence in what was our first experience of running an exhibition in a public space. I invited the regulars at Hope 4's weekly Sunday lunch, more than 40 homeless or people at risk of homelessness, to come and view the exhibition and spoke to them about the archive collections behind the inspiration. One chap, who visited the exhibition, had recently left the army, He talked about his interest in art and was very motivated by doing something totally different to his usual day-to-day.

I know this is more of a one off and for archives rather than libraries but it takes doing something once to see how it can be done better and in a more rounded way in the future.

The project was run by Archives West Midlands in collaboration with Soul City Arts and Arts Connect and more details are available here at [www.strongrooms.org.uk](http://www.strongrooms.org.uk)

Sam Collenette, Archives and Historic Environment Manager, Warwickshire County Record Office

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### **Kirklees Library Service and The Mission (Huddersfield): Using reader development and creative activities to promote reading and good mental health to vulnerable adults**

#### Overview:

The Mission is a charitable organisation in Huddersfield providing advice and support to people in need - those with housing issues, in temporary accommodation or looking for housing. Within the centre there is an affordable café and space for community groups and activities. As well as offering practical help and support around housing, benefits, job seeking and financial advice, The Mission engages with partner organisations to offer a range of positive cultural and art based activities to improve the well-being of all attending the centre. Kirklees Library Service worked with The Mission to provide a range of reader development and creative activities. Joint planning ensured that activities were suited to the participants and a year of

activities culminated in working with local artist Stephen Waterhouse to produce a piece of collaborative art work (on the theme of "identity and community") for display in The Mission café.

#### Aim of the project:

In order to bring about improved mental health, provide an opportunity to work collaboratively and encourage an enthusiasm and interest in books and reading, the project aim was to engage with at least 20 adults, enabling them to

- access a wide range of books
- access information on library services
- be supported in joining the library and becoming active library members
- participate in a range of creative activities linked to books and reading.

#### Input:

Time: Librarian time for planning, activity development and meetings with The Mission staff. Librarian time delivering activity sessions. Librarian time spent at The Mission, meeting and talking to service users in an informal environment e.g. at the cafe or when refreshing the on-trust library. Joint librarian and Mission staff meetings with artist Stephen Waterhouse.

Cost: Small monetary cost for resources, fee for artist Stephen Waterhouse. Total cost was just under £450.

Conclusion: The project cost very little in monetary terms, but was time consuming with regular meetings, delivering the sessions and continuous evaluation/assessment. As a result of the time spent on this project, not only was it a success and all outcomes were met but **50** people took part rather than 20 which was the original aim.

#### Activities:

- Sharing and talking about books which the library service donated to The Mission's on-trust library
- A block of 6 book chat and art sessions focussing on sharing picture books and exploring the illustrative styles (one session a week for six weeks)
- A block of 6 book chat sessions which used various art techniques to respond to poetry (one session a week for six weeks)
- Linking with The Mission's creative writing class to promote library books and resources with a particular emphasis on good mental health
- Organising a visit to Huddersfield library where participants could join the library and find books to support their creative writing classes, as well as find out about how the library could support their job searches and self-supported study
- Hosting a creative writing session using bibliotherapy techniques for the group at Huddersfield library

- Working with artist Stephen Waterhouse to help the group to produce a collaborative art work for display in The Mission
- A celebration event with an official un-veiling of the collaborative art work - participants, friends, family, Mission staff, library staff attended

### Outputs:

As a result of the project activities, the 50 participants

- took part in creative book chat and art sessions
- had access to and experience of library resources and support
- had art work displayed in The Mission
- had the opportunity to take part in a wide range of literary and artistic activities based on books and reading

### Outcomes:

- Book chat sessions and creative writing sessions **improved the participants' knowledge and awareness of library resources**
- Artistic and literary themed activities **improved participants' feelings of well-being**
- As bibliotherapy methods were utilised during book chat sessions, participants had time for **self-reflection and discussions around shared and personal experiences**
- Library visits gave participants **more confidence** in using the library and follow-up sessions at The Mission showcasing online library resources gave participants the **knowledge and confidence** to use the library catalogue, and online account information themselves
- An **increased enthusiasm** and interest in the activities ensured the project maintained momentum and new participants joined as a result of **peer recommendation**
- Participants felt pride and a **sense of achievement** when their art work was completed and displayed

### Evaluation

Evaluation of this project was continuous with changes made in response to feedback. Participants were actively encouraged to recommend topics, books or poems for discussion. End of project evaluation was discreet and included general conversations with participants collected during the year, and comments made during the celebration event.

"This was a great project to be part of. Joint planning was the key for me - having a clear idea of who was doing what, meant library staff and The Mission staff worked effectively together. I know from the comments made in the centre how much all the activities have been appreciated, and there was a real buzz after some sessions particularly the time spent with (artist) Stephen. The adults who use The Mission have a huge range of issues and problems (many have experienced homelessness at some point) and seeing them engaged in something so positive has been fantastic. Although engagement

in activities can be sporadic from people who are homeless we keep the door open. Being able to run activities which are free to access is only possible by working with other agencies and with volunteers. I hope we can continue to work together with the library service and help The Mission's clients tap into what the library has to offer." Samuel Moss - Activity Co-ordinator at The Mission

"I have not been involved in a project like this before, but really enjoyed the opportunity to work with the adults who use The Mission. Everyone was enthusiastic and had lots of ideas. I was a bit nervous about the unveiling of the finished art work, but everyone (including me) loves it. It really reflects the people who took part, and their ideas around identity and community."  
Stephen Waterhouse, artist

### Project participants

"I have been going to The Mission for a long time. I get a lot of advice there and the staff have helped me feel more confident about my future. I like to get involved in any new things that are happening and that's how I met Judith from the library. We got talking in the café and she said that she was starting some book chat sessions which were looking at children's books and giving us the chance to draw and copy the illustrations as well as discuss them. I went along and really enjoyed the sessions. I was surprised how much I remembered about the books I'd read as a child, and how involved I got in the art sessions. I volunteer in The Mission café so when Judith said she was doing more sessions but focussing on poetry I said I would not only come along but would help to spread the word and encourage people to attend."

"As I have written some of my own poetry, the poetry sessions were really great and I liked it because everyone shared their feelings about how the poems made them feel. We did art work (quick sketches and drawings using coloured paper/crayons/ pens/pencils) to show how we felt after listening to the poems. Doing this made me really think about the poems. When I look back at some of the art work I did I can tell how I was feeling because I chose particular colours or had a particular drawing style e.g. I used sharp lines, or soft shapes, or used pale colours or dark colours."

"We were all amazed when we saw what the artist Stephen produced using our ideas and work. When it was unveiled I felt like crying because it looked so professional and I thought "Did we really do that?" I can't remember the last time I felt as proud of something I'd done."

"We went up to Huddersfield library for a creative writing session. I was able to get my library ticket sorted out and explain why the address was different and that I had lost a book in the past. I was scared to use the library and embarrassed to explain about my library card, so hadn't used the library for

years. We had a tour and I loved the reference library because there were big tables and it was quiet. I go there a lot now because there is no quiet space at home! I borrow books a little bit now, but I like to go into the library and just look at the big art books. The pictures in the books inspire me to do more art work, or help me if I want to do some creative writing. I do use the computers in the library as well. I do my job searches and use Facebook."

Judith Robinson (Librarian) Kirklees Library Service, September 2016

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## **Leicestershire**

In Leicestershire, we have a project inspired by the WW1 centenary and funded by Heritage Lottery to create local stories about the war. One of these used library facilities to enable a group of homeless people to complete a research project on German butchers who encountered discrimination at the start of the war.

"The Falcon Centre, Loughborough is a 28 bed hostel that provides accommodation to meet the needs of people in Charnwood, Melton or North West Leicestershire who are homeless or at immediate risk of homelessness.

A group of six residents have been working on a Century of Stories project looking at the town twinning of Loughborough with Shwäbisch Hall, Germany and how the towns are commemorating The Great War 100 years on.

The group investigated the emigration of Pork Butchers from Germany to Loughborough and surrounding areas in the late 1800s. One man in particular set up his pork business in central Loughborough, Heinrich Hasenfuss, and this became one of the main focus for the group. The group visited the site where his original shop stood as well as the family home of Heinrich Hasenfuss."

See: YouTube video at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E7AVk-jr2qw> and "Century of Stories" at: <http://www.centuryofstories.org.uk/projects/the-falcon-centre/>.

Liz Evans, Locality Manager North

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## **Libraries NI**

Libraries NI is currently working with the Simon Community to identify barriers to use. We will soon be introducing a way for those who are homeless and residing in a Simon hostel to join the library without proof of a current address. Simon staff will give written confirmation that they are currently residing in the hostel and this acts as the proof of address. This allows Simon clients to access a range of services including borrowing and access to computers and wifi.

Library information will also be placed in welcome packs handed out to Simon clients.

Helen Poston, Operational Manager, Libraries NI

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### **Newcastle upon Tyne**

Library staff support homeless customers on a daily basis by providing information regarding showering and laundry facilities in the City as well as locations offering free food day by day. They also refer customers who are in agreement to the Housing Advice Centre (HAC) for confidential advice.

Service Support Assistants meet and greet customers and are able to recognise patterns in behaviour with regulars, build up trust, provide support or advice and first aid when necessary. Informally, food has been passed onto homeless customers from the Library Café, which is managed by a private catering company.

As part of as part of our integration and community hubs programme we are investigating how to relocate some or all of the services of the Council's Housing Advice Centre for homeless people into the City Library. They will join Citizens Advice and the local social housing organisation Your Homes Newcastle to form a comprehensive advice centre. This should allow us to offer help and advice on housing debt, employment and skills; referring people to experts within the building rather than someone having to seek advice at several different sites.

Also advice sheet (attached)

Sharon Traill, Library Service Specialist

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### **Richmond upon Thames**

For the past six months Richmond Library Service and SPEAR (a homeless charity based in South West London) have been running a weekly 'shared reading' group for homeless people living within the borough.

During each ninety-minute session the group reads aloud either an especially selected short story or an extract from a longer literary work, as well as a related piece of poetry. We aim to use the literature as a catalyst for examining our own feelings and emotions, or alternatively as a much-needed respite from them too. Shared reading (or even just shared listening – clients are under no pressure to read or to contribute) is an excellent way of building a sense of belonging and camaraderie, a welcome antidote to loneliness and isolation. Our sessions are also a useful gateway to other services available free of charge through our libraries, from

access to books, audiobooks and digital materials to IT advice, community events and job clubs.

The group works well precisely because it's run in partnership between two organisations with similar aims. The library service provides a venue, reading materials and an experienced librarian to lead the group, and SPEAR encourages its clients to attend and provides additional staff and valuable insight.

As much as anything else, the sessions (with obligatory tea, biscuits and fruit) also act as a calm and relaxing social occasion, a place of quiet and contemplation in an otherwise hectic world.

Colm O'Reilly, Librarian heading this project

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### **Stoke-on-Trent Libraries**

We work closely with Open Door, a service which serves drinks and a hot breakfast and hands out food parcels to the homeless and more vulnerable people in Stoke-on-Trent. Our Library ICT Mentors deliver work clubs at Open Door, as well as at foodbanks across the city. Here, they support vulnerable people who require assistance and support with ICT facilities. They have engaged with numerous customers and supported them with online forms, job searching, informal learning opportunities and encourage them to join the library services. They have recently become a direct referrer for Foodbank emergency vouchers.

We received this comment about an Open Door customer who attended a library-based work club:

*I had [[xxx] in at Stoke today – came back to say thanks and let us know that he is now working at [xxx] Warehouse in Stoke. (he also wanted help printing out his pay slip!) He's been there about 3 weeks via Best Connection and they've already asked him to send a CV and covering note to become employed by [the Warehouse] directly!*

A local MP, Ruth Smeeth, has attended Open Door to present an ICT certificate to one of the Open Door clients.

In December, we received funding through Poetry on Loan (an organisation which promotes poetry through libraries in the West Midlands) for a poet to attend Open Door. Jonny Fluffypunk spent the morning chatting to Open Door customers, and produced a group poem made up of their comments about the service. He also wrote an individual poem for one of the customers about the ukulele which he is building from scrap materials (the customer had previously been to the library, looking for measurements needed to create that ukulele).

More information about Open Door is here (you can see Lynne, one of the ICT team, smiling behind her laptop):

<http://www.opendoorstokeontrent.co.uk/>.

Emma George, Community Librarian

Updated 2 November 2016