

# 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](http://www.seapn.org.uk) and includes information on courses, good practice, specific socially excluded groups, as well as the newsletter archive.

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## Did you see ...?

### **ARC Magazine**

The Feb 2019 issue<sup>1</sup> has just been published. It focuses on Community Archives and Heritage, and includes:

- Donna Maughan “Hearing the voices of Stonehouse’s past”, which received the 2018 award for Best Community Engagement and Overall Best Heritage Group from the Community Archives and Heritage Group. [p16]

“The 100 Homes Oral History Project [2] was created via the Stonehouse Timebank. The residents of Stonehouse wanted to record the stories of the people living in the area both past and present, dating back to when the three towns of Stonehouse, Plymouth & Devonport first joined.”

- Alan Butler “People’s archives kept by the people for the people”, which looks primarily at the work of the Plymouth LGBT Archive<sup>3</sup>. [p19]

### **Access**

The latest issue<sup>4</sup> includes a number of interesting articles:

- Rebecca Kennelly “Royal Voluntary Service Home Library Service” [pp7-11]
- Anita Luby “The Final Party”, which outlines Redbridge Library Service’s work: “[...] using our role in the community as a safe & trusted space to engage residents in conversations around death, dying and planning for end of life. Through our project ‘The Final Party’, we have explored a number of public engagement methods in order to establish ourselves as the first ‘Death Positive Library Service’ in the UK” [pp17-21]
- Nick Poole “2019: The Year of Living Digitally”, which looks at new research into library users, and the impact this should have on our perceptions and marketing. He also announced that CILIP:

“[...] want to focus on 6 ‘value propositions’ to help us reposition public libraries in the public psyche:

- ‘A place to unwind and recharge’ – showcasing libraries as places of peace and calm, wellbeing and time well spent (by yourself or with friends);

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<sup>1</sup> *ARC Magazine*, 354, Feb 2019. Further info about subs etc at:

<https://www.archives.org.uk/publications/arc-magazine.html>.

<sup>2</sup> See: <https://www.100homesproject.com/>.

<sup>3</sup> See: <https://plymlgbtarchive.org.uk/>.

<sup>4</sup> *Access: Journal of the Public and Mobile Libraries Group*, 20, Autumn 2018/9.

- ‘The books you love’ – re-connecting libraries with the book lovers movement, including book bloggers, authors, video reviewers and the whole contemporary book culture’;
- ‘Great customer service’ – showcasing the fact that libraries are a friendly, welcoming, safe and trusted environment for the whole community;
- ‘A place to work and get online’ – showcasing the role public libraries are increasingly playing in providing work and meeting space, helping people get online and supporting startups;
- ‘Be with friends’ – positioning libraries as social spaces for a young, diverse audience that is politically-engaged and involved in their community;
- ‘Discover unique experiences’ – exploring the many unique and surprising activities that libraries provide for their communities” [pp24-25]

### ***Books for Keeps***

The Jan issue<sup>5</sup> includes a guest editorial by author, Natasha Carthew, “Stories Matter, Class Matters”, which looks at the lack of working-class voices in children’s books:

“When I was growing up in the eighties I was a fierce reader, but I was often left feeling unfulfilled when I finished reading a book, because where were the stories that featured kids that like me who lived in a council house with a single parent? Where were the children who were on free school meals and had to do the walk of shame past the rest of the school every lunch time?” [p2]

It also includes:

- Farrah Serroukh “Ten of the Best ... starring children from BAME backgrounds”, which recommends ten titles for primary school-aged children [pp12-13]

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## **Health & Wellbeing issues – Government, Government Agencies and Local Government**

### ***A connected Scotland ...***

The UK Government launched its strategy<sup>6</sup> in Oct 2018, and the Scottish Government launched its version<sup>7</sup> on 18 Dec.

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<sup>5</sup> *Books for Keeps*, 234, Jan 2019,

[https://content.yudu.com/web/1mjdV/0A1mjdX/BFK234/html/print/BFK234\\_Download.pdf](https://content.yudu.com/web/1mjdV/0A1mjdX/BFK234/html/print/BFK234_Download.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> *A connected society: a strategy for tackling loneliness – laying the foundations for change*. DDCMS, 2018. Available to download as a pdf from:

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachme>

They have similar aims and ambitions, but the Scottish strategy sets out four Priorities, and this assessment will concentrate on these.

**Priority 1** is to Empower communities and build shared ownership.

Early actions will include:

- “Consider what more we can do to devolve decision-making locally through the work of the local governance review, and look at how future work in this area could potentially allow communities to reduce social isolation and loneliness.
- Work with third sector partners to scope out the development of a resource which supports greater embedding of considerations around social isolation, loneliness and social connectivity within policy and decision-making.
- Take the opportunity of our commitment to publishing an Older People’s Framework in early 2019 to highlight the positive contribution of older people, tackle negative perceptions and challenge the barriers people face as they age, all of which will support our ambitions under this Strategy.
- Ensure that all relevant parts of Government consider how best they align their investments in communities with the ambitions of this strategy.
- Commission research to support greater understanding of how social isolation and loneliness interacts with key life transitions from ‘cradle to grave’, which will inform the development of future actions.
- Convene a roundtable of representatives from the business community to explore further what more the private sector can do to tackle social isolation and loneliness in their communities.
- Encourage businesses to consider using the Workplace Equality Fund to explore ways in which employment inequality can be reduced through greater social connectivity at work.” [p6]

**Priority 2** is to Promote positive attitudes and tackle stigma.

Early actions include:

- “[...] Work with stakeholders to better understand what works in reducing the stigma around social isolation and loneliness.
- Consider with partners what more we can do to promote intergenerational dialogue, as part of the legacy of the Year of Young People.” [p7]

**Priority 3** is to Create opportunities for people to connect.

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[nt\\_data/file/748212/6.4882\\_DCMS\\_Loneliness\\_Strategy\\_web.pdf](#). Assessed in *The Network Newsletter*, 210, Aug 2018, <http://www.seapn.org.uk/uploads/files/Newsletter-NS-210.pdf>, pp11-16.

<sup>7</sup> *A connected Scotland: our strategy for tackling social isolation and loneliness and building stronger social connections*. Scottish Government, 2018. Available to download as a pdf from: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/connected-scotland-strategy-tackling-social-isolation-loneliness-building-stronger-social-connections/>.

Early actions include:

- “Consider existing good practice in supporting people to know what’s happening in their local area, and look at whether this can be rolled out further.
- Work with key partners to raise awareness of the value of befriending and support work to build capacity within the sector.
- Take the opportunity of our new National Volunteering Outcomes Framework to set out a coherent and compelling vision for volunteering and identify the key evidence and data which will be used to drive an increase in participation for all.
- Work with older age groups to understand how digital technology can add value to their lives in a way that is meaningful to them, and link this to our ongoing work to delivering our Digital Strategy for Scotland.” [p8]

These are obviously actions that the cultural sector can be involved in.

**Priority 4** is to Support an infrastructure that fosters connections.

Early actions include:

- “Work with health and social care integration authorities to consider their role in addressing social isolation and loneliness and how best to share good practice.
- Publish a National Implementation Plan to embed self-directed support in social care nationally and locally, so that people can make the decisions that matter to them in terms of being supported to maintain their social connections.
- Pilot innovative housing solutions for older people, testing intergenerational and other co-living arrangements to meet housing needs and reduce social isolation and loneliness.
- Commence a review of Scotland’s National Planning Framework, and consider in that how local development plans can better support vibrant communities with opportunities for greater social interaction.
- Deliver an online hub focused on reducing unintentional harm that includes a number of examples that can help reduce social isolation and loneliness.
- Review our National Transport Strategy, with accessibility identified as a key theme.
- Modernise our Accessible Travel Framework to speed up implementation and seek to make journeys easier for people with accessibility issues.
- Make improvements to the transport system through the provisions in our wide-ranging Transport Bill.
- Through our culture strategy, work to increase access to culture and ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to participate.
- Through our first strategy for public libraries, work to build on what libraries already offer as community hubs with a role in tackling these issues.” [pp9-10]

Again, some of these are areas of work that we can be involved in – and the last action is particularly welcome. As the strategy notes:

“In recognising the importance of libraries, we’re investing in the Public Library Improvement Fund to support innovative ways for people to use public libraries, and are also taking forward the implementation of the first strategy for public libraries in Scotland. We will work to ensure that our approach to increasing access includes hard to reach groups, and considers further how to build on what libraries already offer as community hubs with a role in tackling these issues.” [p67]

The Scottish Government intends to take a cross-Government approach to the strategy and will announce further plans for this early in 2019. In addition:

“Recognising the importance of a long-term approach, this first strategy will run from 2018 to 2026, after which it will be reviewed and updated to reflect progress and the current climate. We will provide updates on progress every two years (in 2020, 2022 and 2024).” [p69]

Recommended.<sup>8</sup>

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## **Disability issues – Libraries, Museums, Archives and Cultural and Heritage Organisations**

### ***Celebrating History of Place: looking to the future***

“History of Place was a landmark project funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund that revealed the presence and place of disabled people in relation to the built environment. These stories were told through the authentic voices of deaf and disabled people who founded, attended, visited and influenced building design and use from the Middle Ages to the present day.”

The final celebratory report<sup>9</sup> of the project has just been published.

“We selected just eight places from across the country spanning 800 years of history to tell the stories of the deaf and disabled people who designed, inhabited or used these buildings. To tell these stories it was essential that the project was run by, consulted with and employed disabled people. Too frequently throughout history disabled people’s needs and views have been ignored or they have been told what is good for them. History of Place wanted to ensure disabled people were telling

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<sup>8</sup> Source: MEMO [Minority Ethnic Matters Overview], 594, 24 Dec 2018.

<sup>9</sup> *Celebrating History of Place: looking to the future*. Accentuate History of Place, 2018. Available to download as a pdf from: [http://historyof.place/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/HOP\\_CelebratonDoc\\_Singlepages1.pdf](http://historyof.place/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/HOP_CelebratonDoc_Singlepages1.pdf). NB The report is very large (49 Mb) – there is a brief summary at: <http://historyof.place/to-boldly-go-where-not-many-cultural-projects-have-gone-before/>. There is also more info about the project at: <http://historyof.place/>.

their own stories. That disabled people could guide the project, conduct the research and deliver the outputs. We know there are thousands of stories out there. Stories that deserve to be told.

We set ourselves ambitions [sic] targets at the start of the project because we wanted to create a sea change in the way deaf and disability history was presented and prioritised. As you read this document, you will see we have accomplished all that we set out to, in some cases over achieving by 500%. In particular we have worked with over 100 volunteers, delivered four digital experiences, made five films with deaf and disabled people, worked with 57 galleries, museums and archives and recorded 31 oral histories. We also produced three flagship exhibitions and displays with our museum partners, M Shed Bristol, the Museum of Liverpool and the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. These exhibitions set out to be fully accessible and placed deaf and disabled people's heritage front and centre within museum programming. The project has been a huge success and we're really proud of what has been achieved, but we are not resting on our laurels. We are now asking museums, policy makers, organisations and individuals to pick up the baton and work with us to continue this momentum." [p7]

The report highlights lessons learned and good practice, as well as noting key challenges that the project faced.

It concludes with "A Call to Action" which includes recommendations from the symposia the project held:

- "A need for arts, cultural and heritage organisations to include the 'hidden histories' of deaf and disabled communities in their displays, exhibitions and events programmes
- A need for arts, cultural and heritage organisations to challenge disability discrimination in any and all of its manifestations
- Improved awareness training across the sector regarding disability and/or access needs
- Arts, cultural and heritage programmes to be designed and delivered in consultation with disabled communities and professionals from across the sector
- A promotion of diversity within and across the sectors of arts, culture and heritage, with increased opportunities for employment, participation and volunteering
- A need for policymakers and funders to acknowledge the importance of arts, cultural and heritage activity for all, supporting the development of a happy and healthy society." [p38]

In addition, the Call includes the need to:

- Create targeted opportunities for deaf and disabled people
- Re-interpret existing collections and make new acquisitions
- Ensure that there is continuing support from policy-makers, including:

- “Prioritise funding for initiatives that seek to challenge inequalities through high quality cultural activities.
  - Understand that real and lasting change takes time and continued investment.
  - Support organisations with considerable knowledge and expertise to work in partnership with others to share learning.
  - Be prepared to take risks and back work with ambitious ideas that could lead to significant positive changes for communities and individuals
  - Value the rich and extensive contributions deaf and disabled people can make to our cultural sector.
  - Realise that the barriers effecting deaf and disabled people’s participation in culture are complex and nuanced. It is no good advocating for more deaf and disabled people in work if the support mechanisms are not in place to enable them to take up opportunities.” [p42]
- Encourage museum and heritage organisations to:
    - “Look at your existing collections, can these be re-interpreted and presented at the forefront of future programming?
    - Strive to work with deaf and disabled people when planning exhibitions and events. Find ways for them to actively influence decisions on content creation and interpretation.
    - Understand deaf and disability history is not a ‘niche’ topic. History of Place has proven there is great interest from the wider public as well as deaf and disabled people themselves. Our research indicates that 81% are interested to learn more about disability history.
    - Consider methods to make all exhibitions and events accessible, not just those that have a disability focus. If all your activities embed accessibility you will diversify and grow your audiences.
    - Uphold the rights of deaf and disabled people to access culture.” [p43]
- Encourage and support individuals to:
    - “Demonstrate commitment to ideas that enable great equality and inclusion by advocating for these aims to others.
    - Always remain open to new ideas and ways of doing things although you may think you know exactly what you are doing. Just because you have always done something a certain way, this may not be the best way of doing it.
    - Listen to deaf and disabled people and value their insights and experiences.
    - If you are a deaf or disabled person who wants to get more involved in cultural activities, recognise you have a lot to offer and explore options to take part.” [p45]

Finally, the report sets out its vision for what the future should look like:

“We have a vision of the future where deaf and disabled people occupy positions as decision makers and leaders of our cultural institutions and where their histories are valued and shared as a matter of course alongside all others. Deaf and disabled people will have access to exhibitions, events, buildings, creative activities and job opportunities alongside non-disabled people. Importantly people will value deaf and disabled people and seek out their involvement whether as volunteers, audiences, participants or colleagues. We are a long way away from this vision.

We are asking organisations to sign up to the following principles:

- Understand and support the rights of deaf and disabled people to access and participate in culture.
- Value the unique experiences and insights deaf and disabled people offer and seek to involve them in all cultural activities.
- Look at ways to remove barriers for disabled people to be active members of the cultural workforce.
- Ensure equality in presenting and telling the histories that relate to deaf and disabled people alongside others.
- Remain open to new ideas and constantly strive to present exhibitions and events in a number of accessible ways.” [p47]

This is a very important – and practical – report which should help bring aspects of disability to the fore. Recommended.

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History of Place have also just launched two practical toolkits:

***Accessible exhibitions for all: a guide to co-designing exhibitions with disabled people – 2018 toolkit***<sup>10</sup>

“This toolkit aims to help more people create accessible exhibitions, diversify these spaces and enable deaf and disabled people to engage with exhibitions and events alongside non-disabled people.” [p3]

It includes sections on creating content; object and image selection; curating the content; safeguarding; accessible design; partnerships; events; ethics; funding and planning; as well as top tips, sources of further support, etc.

***Engaging deaf and disabled young people with heritage- 2018 toolkit***<sup>11</sup>

“Deaf and disabled people include wheelchair users, people with mobility impairments, hearing impairments, vision impairments, Deaf people who use British Sign Language, people with learning disabilities, those

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<sup>10</sup> *Accessible exhibitions for all: a guide to co-designing exhibitions with disabled people – 2018 toolkit*. Accentuate History of Place, 2018. Available to download as a pdf from: [http://historyof.place/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/HOP\\_TK\\_Design\\_Exhibs\\_Final\\_PRINT.pdf](http://historyof.place/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/HOP_TK_Design_Exhibs_Final_PRINT.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> *Engaging deaf and disabled young people with heritage – 2018 toolkit*. Accentuate History of Place, 2018. Available to download as a pdf from: [http://historyof.place/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/HOP\\_TK\\_Design\\_YoungPeople\\_Final\\_PRINT.pdf](http://historyof.place/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/HOP_TK_Design_YoungPeople_Final_PRINT.pdf).

experiencing mental ill health, neurodiversity, other non-visible impairments and chronic health conditions. They are also people who want and have a right to, visit exhibitions and enjoy culture.

Working with young people, defined in this toolkit as being under twenty-five, can enable your organisation to become a more engaging place by challenging perceptions and identifying new ways of working. This will help you to embed an access for all approach within your organisation, and ultimately broaden engagement and participation across all of your communities.” [p3]

It includes sections on recruitment; partnerships; integration; safeguarding; re-creating activities; adapting activities; technology; events; ethics; costs and resources; top tips for working with young, deaf and disabled people; where to go for support, etc.<sup>12</sup>

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## Abbreviations and acronyms

BAME = Black, Asian and minority ethnic

CILIP = Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals

DDCMS = Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

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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:

John Vincent  
Wisteria Cottage  
Nadderwater  
Exeter EX4 2JQ

Tel/fax: 01392 256045  
E-mail: [john@nadder.org.uk](mailto:john@nadder.org.uk)

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<sup>12</sup> Source: email from History of Place, 14 Jan 2019.