

# 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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## Contents List

### Did you see ...?

- *Information Professional* – page 2
- *Museums Journal* – page 2

### Health & Wellbeing issues – Libraries, Museums, Archives and Cultural and Heritage Organisations

- *Health on the shelf: health and wellbeing in public libraries in Scotland* – page 3

Abbreviations and acronyms – page 8

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## Did you see ...?

### **Information Professional**

The March 2020 issue includes:

- “Re-launched website explores one of the ‘darkest chapters of human history” [news item], which notes the relaunching of the Wiener Holocaust Library’s “The Holocaust Explained” website<sup>1</sup> [p11]
- “LGBTQ+ Network goes live” [news item], reporting on the successful launch of the latest CILIP Network<sup>2</sup> [p13]
- Yvonne Morris “Shining a light on activism in the profession”, which outlines CILIP’s “Changing Lives” commitment<sup>3</sup> [pp18-19]
- Nicholas Serota interviewed by Rob Mackinlay “What’s on the cards for ACE’s new heart?”, which looks at key points from the new ACE 10-year strategy, “Let’s Create”<sup>4</sup> [pp24-26]
- Olena Waskiewicz “Making room for difficult conversations in the library”, which looks at how the University of Winchester has developed its Human Library [pp28-30]
- Bob Usherwood “Reading to Recovery – a cinematic journey”, which looks at the background to the new short film, *Reading to Recovery*<sup>5</sup> – the film tells the story of “Lee’s Book Club”, held at Westcotes Library, Leicester, which is for homeless people (some of whom are recovering from addiction). The article also includes a number of useful references which are worth following up to read more about provision for homeless people [pp36-39]
- Rachel Heydecker, Jenny Peachey and Georgina Bowyer “Engaging Libraries: insights from the development programme”, which outlines the work of Phase 2 of the “Engaging Libraries” programme, including brief information about the 14 projects involved<sup>6</sup> [pp44-47]

### **Museums Journal**

The March 2020 issue includes:

- Geraldine Kendall Adams “ACE to gather data on staff socio-economic backgrounds”, which briefly looks at the new question added to the annual survey of NPOs [p7]

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<sup>1</sup> See: <https://www.theholocaustexplained.org/>.

<sup>2</sup> For further information, and details of how to join, see: <https://www.cilip.org.uk/general/custom.asp?page=LGBTQNetwork>.

<sup>3</sup> See: [www.cilip.org.uk/changinglives](http://www.cilip.org.uk/changinglives).

<sup>4</sup> See: <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/letscreate>.

<sup>5</sup> The film is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yXnSFD7TNOs>.

<sup>6</sup> “Engaging Libraries supports public libraries to run public engagement activities on research within the themes of health, society, and culture. It helps to facilitate partnerships between public libraries and researchers, and spark people’s curiosity around topics that are relevant or interesting to them. The programme is a partnership between the Carnegie UK Trust, Wellcome and the Wolfson Foundation.” See: <https://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/libraries/>.

- Simon Stephens “Museums focus on tackling climate crisis”, which rounds up some recent developments (including ACE’s assessment<sup>7</sup>) [p11]
- Rachel Cockett “Look outwards and you may find a solution” [“Comment” column], which outlines work by Birmingham Museums to diversify its staff [p14]
- “Voxpop: What next for decolonisation?”, which includes three (male) views on what should happen next [p15]
- Deborah Mulhearn “Popping up near you”, which looks at the growth in pop-up museums and exhibitions [pp20-25]
- Tilda Coleman “On the mind” [“Trendswatch” column], which looks at some examples of how museums are using exhibitions and wellbeing programmes to help people improve their mental health [p41]

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## Health & Wellbeing issues – Libraries, Museums, Archives and Cultural and Heritage Organisations

### ***Health on the shelf: health and wellbeing in public libraries in Scotland***

This research report<sup>8</sup> has just been published by SLIC:

“This research report investigates the health and wellbeing offer from public libraries in Scotland and uncovers the large scale of services and activities that are available.” [p2]

The report begins with a short introduction, giving an overview of libraries and their impact on health and wellbeing.

This is followed by a chapter setting this within a Scottish context, looking at:

- Scottish Government strategies
- The role of the Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland (aka as The ALLIANCE) – especially in the development of a co-production model:

“The ALLIANCE, NHS Scotland, and the Scottish Government are working with North Ayrshire, South Lanarkshire and Midlothian library services on a two-year SLIC-funded project with collaboration and co-production at its centre. The project is being

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<sup>7</sup> *Sustaining Great Art and Culture: environmental report 2018/19*. ACE, 2020. Available to download as a pdf from: [https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/14-01-20%20Arts%20Council%20Environmental%20Report%20201819%20FINAL\\_3.pdf](https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/14-01-20%20Arts%20Council%20Environmental%20Report%20201819%20FINAL_3.pdf).

Assessed in *The Network Newsletter*, 225, Nov 2019, <https://www.seapn.org.uk/uploads/files/Newsletter-NS-225.pdf>, pp7-9.

<sup>8</sup> *Health on the shelf: health and wellbeing in public libraries in Scotland*. Scottish Library & Information Council, 2020. Available to download as a pdf from: <https://scottishlibraries.org/media/3000/slic-health-on-the-shelf.pdf>.

led by two part-time project officers. The focus is on young people (aged between 10-25) and mental health, looking at early intervention, prevention and self-management. The co-production element ensures that young people are involved in the design of the programme locally. It is being piloted in three different library services who have flexibility over the local design and can implement it as appropriate to their areas. The project will document the learning to see if it can be scaled up elsewhere.” [p8]

- Scottish library strategies<sup>9</sup>.

It then goes on to look at “Health and wellbeing services in libraries”. After a brief look at some of the key evidence of the impact of reading on health and wellbeing, the report assessed the range of services provided by public libraries in Scotland, and, from this, a possible definition of the Scottish libraries’ offer has been drafted:

“Libraries and library staff contribute towards improving people’s health and wellbeing through provision of health-related information in a range of formats; signposting people to other relevant information and organisations; providing health-related activities, services and groups based at the library; and by helping people with their (digital) health information literacy skills so that they have the confidence to find appropriate information for themselves, all within a trusted and welcoming community space with friendly knowledgeable staff.” [p12]

This includes:

- “Collections/stock and other information: in hardcopy and electronic format. Health and wellbeing collections may be separately branded, e.g. as recommended healthy reading lists, bibliotherapy, or books on prescription schemes, may be in a separate area of shelving, or items may be part of the main stock available on the shelves or via requests. Health information may also be provided through provision of leaflets and other materials, generally from external organisations. Information can also be provided in the form of recommended websites or directories, and signposting to relevant organisations.
- Activities and groups: health and wellbeing activities may take place in the library on a regular basis such as weekly/fortnightly dementia reminiscence groups, or more occasionally such as blood pressure checks with an external partner, or less frequently for annual health tie-ins such as mental health day. Some activities may take place outside the library, e.g. in the grounds or surrounding area such as the WalkON groups in Fife who walk in the locality then share a drink and a book chat back at the library.
- Health literacy skills: these are often closely related to digital literacy skills as many people search for information online. Library staff help

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<sup>9</sup> Particularly: *Ambition & opportunity: a strategy for public libraries in Scotland 2015-2020 – refresh*. SLIC, 2019. Available to download as a pdf from: <https://scottishlibraries.org/media/2423/ambition-and-opportunity-refresh-2019.pdf>.

people informally and formally with search strategies, evaluating different sources of information, and improving their confidence and skills to find and use appropriate information.

- Friendly and welcoming staff in a trusted, inclusive and non-clinical space in local communities: social interactions with library staff can be invaluable and the library space and the staff may also be designated as ‘...friendly’ for particular groups, primarily dementia and autism.” [p12]

There is also a handy A-Z listing of initiatives.

Section 4.2 looks at “The local health and wellbeing offer”:

“Across Scotland, library services offer between 1 and 26 different elements, with many services offering around 17 different things. The average is 12 activities/schemes. The most commonly offered are listed below and are available in half or more library services in Scotland (most common listed first):

- Signposting to health and wellbeing services and organisations
- Reminiscence resources, e.g. dementia collections and memory boxes
- Designated health and wellbeing collections
- Health activities in the library or organised by the library, e.g. yoga, walking group, themed group cafes
- ‘Mood boosting’ fiction collection
- Reminiscence groups
- Self-help non-fiction informal list of books
- Bibliotherapy / books on prescription / Reading Well / recommended reading list schemes for adults
- Tie-ins with (national) ‘awareness’ days/campaigns, e.g. Stress Awareness Week
- Macmillan Cancer Information and Support services” [p16]

Section 4.3 draws together evidence of the impact of library activities on health and wellbeing, including in mobile, health, and academic libraries.

Section 5 looks at the views of the public, eg on where they source health information, and marketing.

Section 6 looks at the evidence of impact – this is a really interesting chapter, with lots of short case studies and examples of work that has been developed. It focuses on bibliotherapy; mental health; loneliness and social isolation; older people and ageing; cancer information and support; and, finally, attempts to assess what might be the case if libraries were not delivering these services:

“The evidence from library users presented here indicates that many people find the library services invaluable for their mental health, reducing anxiety, reducing feelings of loneliness, and provision of self-management information and support. Without such interventions some of these people may well have reached a crisis point and appear somewhere in the emergency or welfare system; many GP visits are connected to stress and loneliness. Through taking part in health and

wellbeing activities in libraries, it has provided them with the tools, information and support to manage their health. As other studies have found, it would be beneficial for libraries to gather more high-quality evidence of impact of their health and wellbeing services. This will help raise the profile of the services as well as their value, and will help health care professionals feel confident in referring people to the library service.” [p45]

Section 7 looks at the public library as a trusted community space, both physically and digitally, and includes a look at libraries as inclusive spaces:

“In the last five years there has been a rise in public (and commercial) spaces becoming more suitable for specific groups of people whose interactions with space can be complicated. This is especially so in relation to autism and dementia where places such as hairdressers, supermarkets and cafes may make the whole space ‘xxx-friendly’, or may have specific times where things like lighting and sounds are adjusted to suit the needs of those attending.” [p48]

Section 8 looks at health literacy (or health information literacy):

“Health literacy is often regarded as the ability to understand instructions provided by health professionals, such as how to take medicine or specific details about the treatment. The broader term of health information literacy encompasses people having enough knowledge, understanding and skills to find and use health information appropriately. Both are increasingly recognised as a significant public health concern, particularly in relation to health inequality, and the impact this has on health outcomes and on people’s health [...] Poor health literacy can affect how people interact with the healthcare system, their ability to fill out forms, ability to locate service providers, ability to self-manage their condition, and ability to seek and understand health information.” [p49]

The section looks at the Scottish approach:

“The Scottish approach to health literacy is broader than functional literacy and finding and understanding information as it encompasses people being more confident in relation to accessing and using health information and being a more active partner in their care, including shared decision-making and self-management.” [p50]

and then looks at the library contribution (particularly libraries’ role in assisting digital access and literacy).

Section 9 looks at “Financial benefits from library use”:

“Research has shown that use of public libraries appears to be associated with higher personal wellbeing ratings as well as financial savings through fewer GP visits [...]

The other significant finding was that library engagement has a positive association with general health, i.e. library users are more likely to report

good health. After controlling for other factors, being a regular library user is associated with a 1.4% increase in the likelihood of reporting good general health.” [p54]

Section 10 looks at “Service design and delivery”:

“There are various different design and delivery models in existence, which fall into several broad categories:

- designed and offered by a library – internal/in-house creation, done on their own
- created and implemented with partners
- grant funding to deliver a project – with or without partners
- implement a ‘pre-made’ scheme, e.g. Reading Well from the Reading Agency.” [p56]

Section 11 looks at Universal Health Offers in libraries, and includes examples of universal health and wellbeing offers from around the UK and the Republic of Ireland. The report then asks if there is the potential for an universal offer in Scotland:

“Evidence from the survey of library managers in Scotland and follow-up conversations suggests that there is general overall interest and support in some degree of an all-Scotland offer, but, that retaining local flexibility and local focus is crucial. This would allow services to create and target resources and activities effectively to meet local needs.” [p63]

and the section ends with some ideas as to what such an offer might look like.

In section 12, the report looks at best practice and how/whether this could be scaled up across Scotland, and recommends consideration of whether:

“[...] there are some key activities which might either lend themselves to being scaled up across Scotland or would be useful for each service to offer, and a toolkit developed with key steps for implementation, and possibly champions identified for each activity.” [p66]

Section 13 draws together all 19 recommendations from the report.

Finally, section 14 has some conclusions – key issues to be looked at are:

“This research has found that the health and wellbeing offer in public libraries in Scotland is extensive and varied, and beneficial to those who engage with the activities. The wellbeing benefits brought about through reading and participating in health events in the library help contribute towards people feeling more confident about their health, and needing health services less, leading to savings for the health service. Many of the low-cost low-intensity activities delivered by libraries help people avoid reaching crisis point. Recognition of this contribution is growing and new strategic partnerships will hopefully strengthen this.” [p69]

And:

“Another feature of the health and wellbeing offer in libraries is that it is relatively unknown. Both the public and health care professionals are often unaware of what’s available in local libraries. Indeed, one stakeholder said that libraries contribute towards health and wellbeing ‘by stealth’. This is an acknowledgement not only of the core services which have an impact (such as reading), but also that simple conversations with a caring member of the library staff may have significant impact on someone’s wellbeing in a way that is rarely captured, measured or recognised. It also recognises that it is difficult for libraries to promote this contribution.

There is scope for library services to increase awareness of all that they do in this area so that more people can benefit, and so that health professionals are aware of what is available locally. There is also potential for library services to work with researchers and health professionals to gather appropriate evidence of the beneficial impacts of the library services on people’s health and wellbeing.” [p70]

The appendices give information about the surveys used; and a baseline picture of health and wellbeing services in public libraries in Scotland – as of Summer/Autumn 2019.

As well as obviously being of immense importance in the future development of provision in Scotland, this report gives many examples of good practice, which can be drawn on elsewhere.

Highly recommended.<sup>10</sup>

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## Abbreviations and acronyms

ACE = Arts Council England

CILIP = Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals

NPO = National Portfolio Organisation

SLIC = Scottish Library and Information Council

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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>10</sup> Source: email from Pamela Tulloch, CEO SLIC, 8 Apr 2020.