

# 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 latest issue<sup>1</sup> includes:

- “Opening Lines” column: Anne Barrett (College Archivist and Corporate Records Manager, Imperial College) looks at the work that they and other archives have been doing to collect and preserve information about the scientific break-throughs in the fight against COVID [pp5-6]
- “Joint winners of the 2021 ARA Archive Volunteer Award are unveiled”, which announces the joint winners, Suffolk Archives’ “Pride in Suffolk’s Past” project<sup>2</sup> and Warwickshire County Record Office’s Warwickshire Online Volunteer Network’s (WOVeN) “Mining the Seams” project<sup>3</sup>

### **Books for Keeps**

The July 2021 issue<sup>4</sup> includes:

- Catherine Millar “Life-changing libraries: making a start”, which looks at “[...] the six primary schools involved in Waterstones Children’s Laureate Cressida Cowell’s Life-Changing Libraries campaign to show the transformative impact of school libraries on a child’s life opportunities.” [p3]
- Jodie Lancet-Grant “Hooray for the pirate mums”, which introduces her first book:

“It was my daughters’ realisation that our two-mum family was different to other people’s that inspired me to write my debut picture book *The Pirate Mums*, but they and other kids who have same sex parents are just a small part of its intended readership. I want this rollicking, swashbuckling, colourful adventure (with just a touch of toilet humour) to be taken to the hearts of straight parents, teachers, librarians and all kids whatever their background – whether, like protagonist Billy, they’ve ever wished their family were just a bit more normal – or not.” [p10]

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<sup>1</sup> *ARC Magazine*, 381, Sep/Oct 2021.

<sup>2</sup> “An enthusiastic group of volunteer researchers has been delving into the archives to discover stories about the experiences of ordinary people as well as well-known figures, experiences during the 1980’s when AIDS and HIV were propelled into public consciousness, press coverage and the language used to talk about sexuality in the past.” See: [https://www.suffolkarchives.co.uk/the\\_hold/sharing-suffolk-stories/7239-2/](https://www.suffolkarchives.co.uk/the_hold/sharing-suffolk-stories/7239-2/).

<sup>3</sup> “Mining the Seams was a collaborative project between Warwickshire County Record Office and Derbyshire Record Office. Funded by the Wellcome Trust, the project opened up access to the complete coal archives of both counties for the first time.” See: <https://www.ourwarwickshire.org.uk/content/projects-queries/mining-the-seams/about-mining-the-seams>.

<sup>4</sup> *Books for Keeps*, 249, Jul 2021, [http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/BfK-249-July-2021\\_DL.pdf](http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/BfK-249-July-2021_DL.pdf).

- Darren Chetty and Karen Sands-O'Connor “Home is where you’re understood” [pp11-13], which looks at “[...] at racially minoritised LGBT characters in children’s literature” [p11]
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## Health & Wellbeing issues – Libraries, Museums, Archives and Cultural and Heritage Organisations

### ***Creating space for kindness: an experiment with public libraries in Scotland***

This new report<sup>5</sup> from Carnegie UK Trust:

“[...] sets out why kindness matters to wellbeing; and why it makes sense to consider how libraries can enhance this core aspect of wellbeing in local communities. It then shares the practical experiences of small ‘kindness initiatives’ led by staff in ten library services in Scotland and the learning that emerged from these innovations.” [p2]

The report starts by looking briefly at how we might encourage kindness, and has distilled their findings down to three points:

- Welcoming places
- Informal opportunities:

“Evidence suggests that low level interactions – for example, a greeting or a chat with a member of staff at a checkout – can make a big difference to the quality of daily life for people who might otherwise be isolated and/or lonely. Opportunities matter, but they don’t automatically promote kindness. We need to be able to take risks to engage informally.” [p3]

- Values of kindness:

“Creating space to talk about and notice kindness, and building shared narratives about the things we value as a community, can help to shift attitudes and change behaviours, and build kinder communities.” [p3]

The report says that the reason that public libraries were chosen was:

“A very high proportion of the population – 93% – agree that people are treated with kindness in public libraries in Scotland.” [p4]

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<sup>5</sup> Jenny Peachey and Ben Thurman. *Creating space for kindness: an experiment with public libraries in Scotland*. Carnegie UK Trust, 2021, [https://d1ssu070pg2v9i.cloudfront.net/pex/carnegie\\_uk\\_trust/2021/07/01141514/LOW-RES-4937-CUKT-Creating-Space-Report.pdf](https://d1ssu070pg2v9i.cloudfront.net/pex/carnegie_uk_trust/2021/07/01141514/LOW-RES-4937-CUKT-Creating-Space-Report.pdf).

So:

“In February 2020 we invited interested public library staff in Scotland to be part of a conversation about kindness in libraries, to develop ideas and – crucially – to do something. We provided time and space for participants to come together in a series of workshops to develop ideas that might enhance public libraries’ contribution to wellbeing in their communities through the lens of kindness. We also offered a small amount of funding (up to a few hundred pounds) to test out a small initiative in the workplace.

Twelve out of Scotland’s thirty-two library services responded with a range of ideas. These included: creating large and designated ‘kindness areas’ within the library space, engaging the community about how the library space could help encourage acts of kindness, foregrounding kindness in learning programmes, supporting and creating community art themed on kindness as a touch point for further engagement and discussion about kindness. The majority of services planned to work with partners and people from outside the service, including care experienced young people, local groups and school children.” [p4]

Plans were affected by COVID, and the report outlines changes that were introduced to the original programme as a result of the pandemic.

The report describes briefly what the projects were, and then goes on to look at what was learned from them. This includes:

- Connection that transcends the physical (especially in the light of COVID)
- Creating time to think about kindness is in itself powerful- pausing for reflection
- It doesn’t take a lot to do something impactful
- It’s important to create space for library staff to connect and to think.

Finally, the report draws together some key principles:

- “Keep it simple: Small, simple interventions can be effective.
- Give people permission: How can you create the conditions that enable members of the public to take the affective and personal risks involved in acting kindly? How can you support members of the public to take and manage these risks positively?
- Think about existing spaces and places: How can you use existing places to create small moments of connection? What role do libraries play in narratives of place and belonging that facilitate a sense of community and kindness? How can you facilitate conversations for people in their communities about what kindness means to them and how they can both notice and encourage it further?
- Think about existing assets and mechanisms: Do you have a way of working that lends itself to delivering an idea? Are there existing services or activities (e.g. books on wheels or book groups) that you could use to encourage (more) kindness and connection?

- Find co-travellers: Could you reach out to staff in other services to see if they would like to experiment and learn with you? What about people who work or live locally who share your vision and would like to partner with you?" [p11]

It concludes:

"These principles, hints and tips, and the wider learning from the project may provide a useful steer for libraries and library staff who are interested in developing their interest and ideas on kindness. But the biggest thing that we have learned from these initiatives is that public libraries can use kindness as a way to enhance wellbeing at a community level. If staff are given just a little bit of time for a conversation, and a little bit of freedom to innovate, good things can happen. Moreover, it has shown that – rather than being a distraction from COVID-19 – focusing on kindness and the wellbeing benefits that this can bring is of particular relevance during times of uncertainty and challenge." [p11]

Recommended.<sup>6</sup>

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### ***The Beaney health and wellbeing in museums toolkit***

This new toolkit<sup>7</sup> draws on The Beaney's<sup>8</sup> work as "[...] a pioneering therapeutic museum, embedding health and wellbeing as a priority across all museum activities." [p2]

It is intended as a step-by-step guide, giving:

- "An introduction to the research underpinning health and wellbeing practice in museums.
- Guidance on the practical steps of planning, running and evaluating health and wellbeing activities.
- A list of resources and further reading to develop your ideas further.

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<sup>6</sup> Source: *CILIP Scotland Newsletter*, Aug 2021.

<sup>7</sup> *The Beaney health and wellbeing in museums toolkit*. The Beaney House of Art & Knowledge, 2021, <https://canterburymuseums.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/The-Beaney-Wellbeing-Toolkit-Interactive.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> "The Beaney House of Art and Knowledge is a Museum, Gallery, Library and Visitor Information Centre in the heart of Canterbury, Kent. Alongside the permanent collection of historical artefacts and treasured art works, the museum has additional gallery spaces for an ever changing programme of special exhibitions, contemporary works and community engaged shows.

The Beaney has developed an award-winning health and wellbeing programme, which uses its unique building and collections to enhance visitors experience. As the Culture, Health and Wellbeing Alliance South East Museums Champion, The Beaney is a pioneering therapeutic museum, embedding health and wellbeing as a priority across all museum activities. This includes running regular health and wellbeing groups, hosting public events, innovative exhibitions and developing the learning programme to ensure that everyone who comes to The Beaney gets the most out of their visit." [p2]

- References and appendices to provide you with the research and tools that were drawn on to develop this document.” [p4]

Section 1 looks at “Why health and wellbeing?”, laying out the case for why this area of work is so important.

Section 2 focuses on “Choosing a group and recruiting participants”, which “[...] gives an overview of the various things you’ll need to consider to help you choose a group of participants, how to meet their needs and support them to get the most out of your project.” [p12] This includes choosing the right activities for the group and ensuring that the setting where the activities are to take place is appropriate.

Section 3 is about “Planning health and wellbeing activities”. This includes administration; choosing the right type of activity to run; ensuring that what we do is flexible; finding a facilitator – with a case study from Chatham Historic Dockyard.

Section 4 looks at “Measuring the impact of your project”, including ways of evaluating (quantitative; qualitative; creative; economic).

Section 5 looks at funding, with some very sound advice:

“There are multiple ways to fund your work and multiple resources that you will already have at your disposal to help manage the costs. Funding should be planned from the start of your project, as well as the legacy; consider how you will continue to cover the costs of a project if it proves to be successful.” [p31]

Finally, there are appendices with examples of facilitator questions for object-handling; tips on hiring a facilitator; Likert Scale examples; and an example of a form used for the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale; plus a bibliography and suggested further reading.

This is a very useful, practical resource – recommended.<sup>9</sup>

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

### ***Curating for change: disabled people leading in museums***

This important report<sup>10</sup> has just been published:

“During the consultation and planning process for Curating for Change, we spoke to a wide range of museums, sector organisations, disabled

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<sup>9</sup> Source: *Culture, Health and Wellbeing Alliance Bulletin*, Aug 2021.

<sup>10</sup> Esther Fox and Jane Sparkes. *Curating for change: disabled people leading in museums*. Accentuate, 2021, [http://www.accentuateuk.org/domains/accentuate.org.uk/local/media/video/Curating\\_for\\_Change\\_Disabled\\_People\\_Leading\\_in\\_Museums.pdf](http://www.accentuateuk.org/domains/accentuate.org.uk/local/media/video/Curating_for_Change_Disabled_People_Leading_in_Museums.pdf).

people's organisations, D/deaf, disabled and neurodivergent people working in museums or wanting to pursue a career in museums. This report is a summary of this consultation, highlighting the barriers disabled people are facing if wishing to pursue a career in museums." [p4]

The key findings in the report include:

- "Almost all of the D/deaf, disabled and neurodivergent people who took part in our consultation workshops expressed the positive opportunity Covid-19 has presented in terms of flexible remote working, interview practices and digital engagement for audiences.
- The most cited reasons for D/deaf, disabled and neurodivergent people not making progress in terms of pursuing a career in museums were: inaccessible recruitment practices; lack of flexibility as to working patterns; and unnecessary requirements (e.g. driving licence, ability to lift objects), that could be met through other provision such as Access to Work.
- The main reason our Partner Museums wanted to take part in Curating for Change was to increase their skills and expertise. More specifically, they hoped to: increase understanding of how to recruit D/deaf and/or disabled staff (94.1%); gain new skills regarding how to create fully accessible exhibitions and experiences (88.2%); and understand how to engage more D/deaf and/or disabled audience members (88.2%).
- Many of those disabled people's groups and disabled individuals surveyed stated they would like to see more of their heritage reflected in museum collections, exhibitions and events. In addition, they wanted to work more closely with museums to co-produce these outputs." [p5]

The report begins by outlining the consultation process. This is followed by a "Where we are now" section which looks at the impact of COVID and remote working, and then looks at the likely (blended) future. It investigates barriers – for individuals in the workforce, for audiences – and concludes:

"There are noticeable similarities in terms of barriers to engagement for both workforce and audiences, in that our Partner Museums highlighted a lack of skills or specialist support as a significant issue. However, financial restraints also feature more highly in terms of engaging with D/deaf, disabled and neurodivergent audiences." [p17]

Section 3 looks at recruitment:

"Time and time again, recruitment practices were raised as one of the major barriers in preventing people from progressing or beginning their careers. Equally, our Partner Museums told us that they are keen to employ more D/deaf, disabled and neurodivergent people, yet struggle to attract and appoint applicants." [p18]

and goes on to look at some key issues, such as barriers; expectations; interviews; physical requirements; inappropriate questioning; etc.

Finally, Section 4 is "Call to action: recruitment and audience", which is full of important recommendations and tips.

This is a really important and useful report, recommended.<sup>11</sup>

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## Broader issues – Libraries, Museums, Archives and Cultural and Heritage Organisations

### ***Forward: Scotland's Public Library Strategy 2021-2025***

SLIC launched this new Strategy<sup>12</sup> for Scottish public libraries in Aug 2021.

“As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, this strategy embraces the collective desire to not simply return to normal but to do things differently, more efficiently, and more sustainably. Informed and shaped by key national policies and priorities, it places libraries at the heart of recovery.” [p2]

It is underpinned by three key themes:

- “People: Libraries will support people and communities to reach their full potential and celebrate the unique skill set of staff.
- Place: Libraries will be recognised as both valued places and place makers, with community led design at the heart.
- Partnership: Libraries will deliver on local and national priorities through a strategic approach to collaboration and partnership.” [p2]

and these themes are developed into the Strategic Aims 2021-2025:

#### “People

1.1 Embed libraries as lead contributors to reading and literacy by closing the learning gap in communities, through national programmes and local initiatives.

1.2 Improve wellbeing and support post COVID-19 recovery with programmes which target health, economic growth, and strengthen communities.

1.3 Encourage active citizenship through access to trusted, accurate information which empowers communities to make informed decisions.

1.4 Equip library staff with the skills to deliver a progressive library service and nurture leaders at all levels.

1.5 Reflect the rich and diverse communities in both library resources and programming to make them accessible to all.

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<sup>11</sup> Source: Museum Association update, 6 Aug 2021.

<sup>12</sup> *Forward: Scotland's Public Library Strategy 2021-2025*. SLIC, 2021, <https://scottishlibraries.org/media/3344/foward-scotlands-public-library-strategy-digital.pdf>.

## Place

- 2.1 Deploy people-centred design principles and decision making to ensure service development is collaborative.
- 2.2 Design library services which reach the heart of communities and engage with new audiences.
- 2.3 Ensure the digital and physical space are blended to create a high-quality offer responsive to evolving needs.
- 2.4 Curate a diverse cultural offer which celebrates local and national heritage and encourages community led experiences.
- 2.5 Explore new ways to support business start-ups, economic growth and stimulate co-production.

## Partnerships

- 3.1 Develop partnerships which support more resilient, fairer, healthier communities.
- 3.2 Amplify the voice of public libraries through inclusive communication to ensure key messaging reaches all stakeholders.
- 3.3 Collaborate with partners to contribute towards the sustainable development agenda for 2030.
- 3.4 Explore sustainable investment opportunities and preventative spend impact whilst demonstrating libraries return on investment.
- 3.5 Develop a service improvement culture which embeds consistent data measurement and self-evaluation practices.” [pp16-17]

These aims:

“[...] are underpinned by five foundations for success which will ensure libraries deliver effective outcomes:

- Data Driven Service Design
- Equality, Diversity & Inclusion
- Seamless Customer Journey
- Staff Culture
- Sustainability

A corresponding set of local and collaborative actions will drive libraries forward over the next five years.” [p5]

and these are illustrated by a number of brief case studies, and these also show which Sustainable Development Goals and National Performance Outcomes they contribute to.

The whole Strategy is aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals<sup>13</sup>, aiming to contribute to Goals 1, 3, 4, 8, 10, 11, 12, 16, and 17<sup>14</sup>.

The Strategy is also mapped against Scotland's National Performance Framework<sup>15</sup>. This aims to create joined-up working across Scotland in order to:

- “create a more successful country
- give opportunities to all people living in Scotland
- increase the wellbeing of people living in Scotland
- create sustainable and inclusive growth
- reduce inequalities and give equal importance to economic, environmental and social progress”<sup>16</sup>

The intention is to work towards National Outcomes:

“The outcomes:

- reflect the values and aspirations of the people of Scotland
- are aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals
- help to track progress in reducing inequality

These national outcomes are that people:

- grow up loved, safe and respected so that they realise their full potential
- live in communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe
- are creative and their vibrant and diverse cultures are expressed and enjoyed widely
- have a globally competitive, entrepreneurial, inclusive and sustainable economy
- are well educated, skilled and able to contribute to society
- value, enjoy, protect and enhance their environment
- have thriving and innovative businesses, with quality jobs and fair work for everyone
- are healthy and active

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<sup>13</sup> See: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>.

<sup>14</sup> The 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) to transform our world: GOAL 1: No Poverty; GOAL 2: Zero Hunger; GOAL 3: Good Health and Well-being; GOAL 4: Quality Education; GOAL 5: Gender Equality; GOAL 6: Clean Water and Sanitation; GOAL 7: Affordable and Clean Energy; GOAL 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth; GOAL 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure; GOAL 10: Reduced Inequality; GOAL 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities; GOAL 12: Responsible Consumption and Production; GOAL 13: Climate Action; GOAL 14: Life Below Water; GOAL 15: Life on Land; GOAL 16: Peace and Justice Strong Institutions; GOAL 17: Partnerships to achieve the Goal.

See: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/envision2030.html>.

<sup>15</sup> See: <https://nationalperformance.gov.scot/>.

<sup>16</sup> Taken from: <https://nationalperformance.gov.scot/what-it>.

- respect, protect and fulfil human rights and live free from discrimination
- are open, connected and make a positive contribution internationally
- tackle poverty by sharing opportunities, wealth and power more equally”<sup>17</sup>

The Strategy also aligns with other key strategies, such as *A Culture Strategy for Scotland*<sup>18</sup>, *A changing nation: how Scotland will thrive in a digital world*<sup>19</sup> and *Fairer Scotland Action Plan*<sup>20</sup>.

Going back to the five ‘foundations for success’, this assessment will look at the second one, ‘Equality, Diversity & Inclusion’. The Strategy describes this as:

“Viewed as a societal leveller, public libraries provide access to services free at the point of entry to all. Public libraries will address universal barriers – physical, financial, and cultural – to ensure equity of access. Inclusive service including stock and recruitment policies, will ensure that individuals and communities feel represented in collections and programming.” [p29]

This relates to Strategic Aim 1.5: “Reflect the rich and diverse communities in both library resources and programming to make them accessible to all.”

Each Aim has local actions and collaborative actions. For its local actions, Aim 1.5 has:

“Library services:

- Remove financial penalties for all borrowers.
- Publish stock policy detailing accessible options and diverse stock selection methods.
- Actively consult with communities with direct and lived experience to shape planning.” [p29]

and, for the collaborative actions:

- “Monitor workforce demographics as part of national workforce data pilot.
- Produce standard accessibility guidelines to ensure equity of access across Scottish libraries” [p29]

Under Strategic Aim 2.4, “Develop a diverse cultural offer which celebrates local and national heritage and encourages community led experiences”, there are included in local actions:

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<sup>17</sup> Taken from: <https://nationalperformance.gov.scot/what-it>.

<sup>18</sup> See: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/culture-strategy-scotland/>.

<sup>19</sup> See: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/a-changing-nation-how-scotland-will-thrive-in-a-digital-world/>.

<sup>20</sup> See: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/fairer-scotland-action-plan/>.

- “Engage with communities to programme events that amplify voices of those not often heard.” [p39]

and, under Aim 3.2, “Amplify the voice of public libraries through inclusive communication to ensure key messaging reaches all audiences”, there is a local action:

- “Commit to reach out to underrepresented groups.” [p48]

This revised Strategy is extremely important – and timely. As the UK begins to ‘build back’ following the pandemic, public libraries’ role needs to be fully recognised and funded, and also seen as a major priority by Government and other agencies.

By tying the Strategy into so many other national strategies and policies, this is surely placing libraries on a strong, well-embedded base, and the Strategy is very welcome.

Yet I also have a yearning for something more ... The kind of public library service envisaged is clearly modern and effective, yet its social justice role seems to have dropped down the agenda. Particularly at the moment, for example, there could have been a stronger emphasis on the role of libraries in welcoming New Scots and dealing with some of the complex issues around new arrivals in communities, as well as tackling racism and Islamophobia. Similarly, the vital role that libraries play in supporting LGBTQ+ people – especially those who identify as nonbinary or trans – could have been highlighted. Instead, to my mind at least, we have the vision of a strong public library service which may be efficient in terms of high tech responses to events but there is a danger this could be at the expense of a service that has less of a feeling for the people that we are working with.<sup>21</sup>

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## Abbreviations and acronyms

ARA = Archives and Records Association

SLIC = Scottish Library and Information Council

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<sup>21</sup> Source: CILIP Scotland *Newsletter*, Sep 2021.