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

Number 95, March 2009

(formerly published as *Public Libraries & Social Exclusion Action Planning Network Newsletter*, issue 1, May 1999 – issue 29, September 2001)

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.
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Contents List

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The Network – 10th anniversary logo

Thank you to our website designers, Electric Putty (http://www.electricputty.co.uk/), for creating the 'badge'.

The Network – three courses that we're involved in

Everything You Wanted To Know About Social Media - The Social Media Exchange for the Cultural and Heritage Sectors
1 June, 9.45-17.00
The Resource Centre, Holloway Road, London N7 6PA
Further details at:
http://www.seapn.org.uk/editorial.asp?page_id=21&e_id=237&page=2

Looked-after children and libraries
9 June, 9.30-16.30
Friends' Meeting House, 6 Mount Street, Manchester M2 5NS
Further details at:
http://www.seapn.org.uk/editorial.asp?page_id=21&e_id=225&page=2

Out in the Library
18 June, 9.00-16.00
The CREATE Centre, Smeaton Road, Bristol BS1 6XN
Further details at:
http://www.seapn.org.uk/editorial.asp?page_id=21&e_id=204&page=2

Did you see …?

Library & Information Update

The latest issue[1] has a couple of very interesting articles:

- Stephanie Lafferty "Welcoming people with learning difficulties", an account of training undertaken in Enfield Libraries with local charity, One to One [pp54-55]
- Shan Wilkinson "The lure of true stories", a cross-sectoral National Year of Reading project [pp64-65].

Adults Learning

The February issue[2] has a number of interesting articles, including:

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[1] CILIP *Library & Information Update* January/February 2009.
[2] *Adults Learning* 20 (6) February 2009. Further information available at: www.niace.org.uk/adultslearning.

- "'Too many' cannot read and write" – a brief note of the Public Accounts Committee's report[3] on adult literacy and numeracy [p5]
- "Adult learning matters", a collection of comments from supporters of the NIACE Campaigning Alliance for Lifelong Learning, including Mike Chaney "Volunteer librarians are making history in Puddletown" [pp14-15]
- "'I'm all about giving power to those without it'", an interview by Paul Stanistreet with John Hayes, Conservative Shadow Minister for Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education [pp20-22]
- Tricia Hartley "Achieving all our ambitions", an introduction to a new pamphlet[4] from the Campaign for Learning, which calls for a broadening of thinking on who should benefit from higher education [p23]

Tackling social exclusion – Other Agencies

Race to the top

This new report[5] from Business in the Community:

"… is based on new research carried out by Race for Opportunity[6] who used data from the Office of National Statistics (ONS) in order to analyse the changes in ethnic minority populations, both in terms of total numbers and in the number achieving management positions and particularly senior-level jobs. It then broke the data down by region, gender, ethnic group and occupation to give an overall picture of the successes – and obstacles – on the path to management." [p4]

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[3] House of Commons. Public Accounts Committee. *Skills for Life: progress in improving adult literacy and numeracy. Third report of Session 2008-09.* The Stationery Office, 2009. Available to download as a pdf (1230 kb) from: http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmselect/cmpubacc/154/154.pdf. The report states [p3]: "Although the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, and its predecessor, the Department for Education and Skills, spent around £5 billion on basic skills courses between 2001 and 2007 (£9 billion by 2011), large numbers of the adult working population of England remain functionally illiterate and innumerate."

[4] Mark Corney, Nigel Brown and Mick Fletcher. *Higher education and the cuckoo in the nest: getting beyond the fixation with full-time study by young people.* Campaign for Learning, 2008. Available to download as a pdf (793.49 kb) from: http://www.campaign-for-learning.org.uk/cfl/assets/documents/OtherDocuments/HE_Cuckoo_Nest.pdf.

[5] *Race to the top: the place of ethnic minority groups within the UK workforce.* Business in the Community, 2008. Available to download as a pdf (2066 kb) from: http://www.bitc.org.uk/workplace/diversity_and_inclusion/race/index.html.

[6] Race for Opportunity is Business in the Community's workplace programme that focuses on race equality. For further information, see: http://www.bitc.org.uk/workplace/diversity_and_inclusion/race/index.html.

The report highlights four main areas of concern:

1. "On current trends, ethnic minorities in management will never be in line with their representation in the overall population
2. The number of black and ethnic minority workers making it to the highest levels of management – the boardroom – is very small and in some cases too small to analyse
3. In an increasingly diverse society this shortfall is not only morally wrong but a self-inflicted wound by companies that waste management potential
4. Policymakers and employers must be on guard to ensure that the current recession does not lead to a reversal of the progress that has been made …" [p4]

Recommendations include

- "Promote positive action to speed up progress of ethnic minorities in a way that both gives clarity to employers and does not stoke up accusations of unfair treatment against the white population …
- Ensure that the achievements – working class whites and ethnic minorities – are recognised across the curriculum; and
- Ensure that talented BAME people progress in the public sector; and in all walks of public life. Only by leading by example can government show the private sector what can be achieved." [p13]

In addition, the report looks at what all employers can contribute, including:

- "Setting public targets and monitoring and measuring progress in an accountable and visible way;
- Taking positive action such as organising workplace mentoring, supporting employee networks and establishing links with the community to provide positive role models; and
- Ensuring BAME workers can see clearly how they can progress within an organisation, ensuring the talent pipeline is representative of the workforce and community. There can be no more 'old school tie' or 'one of us'." [p13][7]

Who cares about the white working class?

This new report[8] from the Runnymede Trust takes an overview of the issues that have recently appeared in the media, looking at the segregation of and competition between different ethnic groups in the UK (please see below).

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[7] Source: *Professional Manager* 18 (2) March 2009, p5.
[8] Kjartan Páll Sveinsson (ed). *Who cares about the white working class?* Runnymede Trust, 2009 (ISBN-13:978-1-9067321-0-3). Available to download as a pdf (1950 kb) from:
http://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/publications/pdfs/WhoCaresAboutTheWhiteWorkingClass-2009.pdf.

As the Trust state in their press release:

> "The Runnymede Trust … publishes a new study today on the white working class and ethnic diversity in Britain ... In response to Hazel Blears' [sic] call for white working class voices and grievances to be heard, leading thinkers on race and class consider the relationship between social class and race equality. They conclude that the white working class are discriminated against on a range of different fronts, but they are not discriminated against because they are white."[9]

Kjartan Páll Sveinsson says in the introduction:

> "… the terms of the debate need to be widened to include the deeply ingrained hierarchical class structure which remains one of the hallmarks of British life … The running theme throughout the contributions is that the plight of the white working class is constructed – by the media, politicians and anti-immigrant groups – as either the fault of immigrants and minority ethnic groups, or the cultural deficit of the underclass, or both, while leaving the hierarchical and highly stratified nature of Britain out of the equation." [p5].

The report looks at:

- Class in the 21st century
- Education
- "Making sense of white working class educational underachievement"
- "Beyond the pale: chavs, youth and social class"
- "… Respectability, value and affect in class relations"
- Social housing
- "Moving representations of the 'indigenous white working class'"
- "From housing to health – to whom are the white working class losing out? Frequently asked questions"

This is a fascinating and thought-provoking collection of essays which go beneath the surface of a major, topical issue. Recommended.

Sources of resentment …

This report[10] was published at the beginning of January, with immense media coverage.

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[9] Taken from:
http://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/PressReleases/PressReleaseWhoCares.pdf.
[10] Steve Garner *et al. Sources of resentment, and perceptions of ethnic minorities among poor white people in England: report compiled for the National Community Forum*. Communities and Local Government, 2009 (ISBN: 978-1-4098-1015-5). Available to download as a pdf (397 kb) from:
http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/1113921.pdf.

It was drawn from a small-scale piece of research (43 people were interviewed – they were from four "relatively monocultural 'white' urban spaces with different migration experiences" [p5].

What was highlighted (particularly in terms of the recommendations) was not necessarily the focus of media attention! There were four main recommendations:

- "the adoption of shared and consistent approaches at all levels of government, which for example, involves appointing a lead officer at local authority level."
- The need to reduce the gaps in people's information about immigration and how resources are allocated
- To establish a working definition of integration
- "Lastly, in response to the widespread reference to 'political correctness' as a negative force, we suggest using a similar dialogue-based approach to evaluating exactly what people mean when they say this, and then attempting to sift what is helpful from what is less so." [p10]

It's worth checking the information in this report, partly to understand where the Runnymede Trust report is coming from, and partly to determine the reality of what some parts of the media turned into a quite different story.

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

Taking stock: the future of our public library service

UNISON published this report[11] on the current state of British libraries in September 2008.

The report begins by setting public libraries in their historical context, and this introduction is very useful if you want to trace the development of some key library themes such as legislation, monitoring, etc.

It then goes on to explore some major areas ("The state of the library service and the challenges ahead"), seeking to pull out arguments from a range of voices (eg Patrick Conway, Tim Coates, MLA, DCMS), and looking particularly at:

- Governance and funding
- Measuring value and quality, including:
    - Funding and costs

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[11] Davies, Steve. *Taking stock: the future of our public library service.* UNISON, 2008. Available to download as a pdf (1270 kb) from: http://www.unison.org.uk/acrobat/17301.pdf.

- o Charging
- o Library visits and usage
- o Book stocks, acquisitions and issues
- o Library facilities
- o The Private Finance Initiative
- o Staffing, skills and training
- o The public sector ethos.

The next section, "The public service reform agenda", looks briefly at the Government's competition and choice agendas, leaving space for a more in-depth look in the final section at "The PricewaterhouseCoopers proposals".

Finally, the report:

> "… called on the government and local authorities to adopt a five point plan to maintain and improve the library service. The basic needs of libraries are fairly straightforward. A commitment to these five broad objectives can be the beginning of a real debate on the detail and implementation." [p44]

The five broad objectives are:

1. Adequate resources and funding for library services, staff and premises
2. Empowerment of staff and communities to shape services together
3. Partnership working between libraries and councils across the UK to share information and good practice
4. Responsiveness to library users from all backgrounds
5. Provision of staff training and professional development.

It concludes:

> "In examining the current state of the public library service, identifying some of the threats as well as the opportunities, it is hoped that the report contributes to the debate about its future. The public library service should build on its past successes; learn from the failed experience of contracting out other public services and go forward as a well-funded, publicly provided, top quality public service fit for the 21st century." [p45]

This is an immensely impressive report, in terms of background reading and research, and Steve Davies has analysed a considerable volume of research, not just into public libraries, but across the central and local government spheres.

It is clear that UNISON sees the threat to the future of public libraries (and, maybe, local authority provision altogether) as being the continuing threat of privatisation (what it describes as "… a repetition of some of the tired and failed ideas of the previous administration – in terms of commercialisation and contracting out." [p44]). It particularly focuses on PFI and the

PricewaterhouseCoopers ideas (which were published by CLG[12]) about creating competition, and draws together considerable evidence to challenge both as feasible, cost-effective ways of running public services.

However, having built up a head of steam, the powerful start to the report is not maintained (in my opinion) when it reaches the recommendations, particularly in the first one about resources. This states:

> "Central and local government need to ensure that libraries have sufficient funds to maintain and develop an attractive book stock. They also need to be able to provide the traditional range of services, in terms of children's, reference and local studies sections. Online access to reference sources and general use of the internet should be maintained and developed but should not be done at the expense of the book stock ..." [p44]

This falls squarely into the position of seeing libraries as being primarily about books, and not recognising the importance draw that ICT has for different communities (not to mention young people!).

In addition, the recommendation about empowerment seems weak: "much more could and should be done to involve both the staff and the local communities in the shaping of the service" [p44]. There is a growing wealth of evidence about libraries' outreach and community-based work (and also their key impact in relation to the wider agenda, particularly the sense of place and leadership), which is not properly recognised, and the role that libraries play in building social justice is almost completely absent.

Finally (and again in my own opinion), the recommendation about staff training and professional development is a missed opportunity in that it neither gives adequate recognition to what is already happening, nor challenges those library authorities that see the funding for training and development of staff as an early option for reductions. It says:

> "Staff training should be increased for all staff and a discussion opened up with the union both nationally and locally, involving the library schools, on the skill set likely to be required of tomorrow's library staff." [p45]

I'm afraid that this discussion has been going on for at least 20 years, and many forward-looking public library services have decided they cannot wait any longer, and are appointing staff with a range of skills and qualifications,

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[12] *Developing the local government services market: new ways of working and new models of provision within the public library service – a working paper.* DCLG, 2007. Available to download as a pdf (227 Kb) from: http://www.communities.gov.uk/pub/219/DevelopingtheLocalGovernmentServicesMarketNewwaysofworkingandnewmodelsofprovisir_id1508219.pdf. See *The Network Newsletter* 70, March 2007, p8 – http://www.seapn.org.uk/content_files/files/newsletter_ns_70.pdf.

not just in librarianship. Maybe the report needed to acknowledge this, and look at what a good way forward could be …

This report certainly does contribute to the current debate about the role of the public library. However, it has not exactly hit the headlines – in or outside libraries – and has, maybe, focused on two specific dangers when there is a much larger and more imminent problem, the economy and long-lasting financial shortfalls. It could also be argued that the report does not really recognise the climate we are working in and that it is frankly unrealistic not to see how far libraries could become part of and contribute to the wider agenda.

Its recommendations do not spell out what libraries can do, nor what should be expected of local and central government – an opportunity lost?

Broader issues – Government, Government Agencies and Local Government

Community …

This new report[13] from The Scottish Government and COSLA looks at the further development of community empowerment in Scotland.

> "In April 2008, the Scottish Government and COSLA announced a joint statement of commitment to community empowerment. This is an important first for Scotland. It sets Government at national and local level on a long term path to make sure that more communities become more empowered across the country.
>
> This Action Plan builds on that statement and provides clarity on what community empowerment is, why community empowerment is important and how communities become empowered. It also sets out a range of new and existing practical actions which underpin the process of community empowerment. Taken together, these actions are designed to help everyone involved in community empowerment to deliver more empowered communities over the coming years." [p5]

The Scottish Government and COSLA have agreed a definition for community empowerment:

> "Community empowerment is a process where people work together to make change happen in their communities by having more power and influence over what matters to them." [p8]

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[13] *Community: Scottish community empowerment action plan – celebrating success, inspiring change*. The Scottish Government, 2009 (ISBN-13: 978-0-7559-8012-3). Available to download as a pdf (2567.2 kb) from: http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/264771/0079288.pdf.

They have also recognised – and included in the scope of the definition – communities of interest and identity.

The document goes on to look at how communities become empowered ("The key thing is that empowerment cannot be given to communities by others. Communities must decide the level of empowerment they want and how to get there themselves" [p10]); the part that community capacity-building plays in this; and the roles of national, local and community organisations. It then looks at how successful empowerment might be evaluated and measured.

The second section looks at what kinds of specific actions might be taken (eg how local communities have got their local authorities to listen to what they want); and what funding streams are available to support the work.

The final section is a selection of case studies.

This Action Plan gives some clear examples of the ways that empowerment can develop – well worth reading!

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Abbreviations and acronyms

CLG = Department of Communities and Local Government
COSLA = Convention of Scottish Local Authorities
DCMS = Department for Culture, Media and Sport
MLA = Museums, Libraries and Archives Council
NIACE = National Institute of Adult Continuing Education
PFI = Private Finance Initiative

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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:

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