

Recreation & Heritage Equality & Diversity Case Studies
Some examples of Library & Information Service contributions to
community cohesion and wellbeing
(Nov 07)

Case Study 1: Discovery Centres

- **Key Issues**

National and local statistics for use of library services (book issues, footfall, surveys et al) have indicated two significant problems:

- decline in overall usage
- intensive / regular usage tends to be restricted to a relatively narrow section of the community in terms of age, gender, ethnic origin and socio-economic status

It was perceived that there was an urgent need to update the whole image of the library service and its buildings and to make them more appealing to a much wider cross-section of the community, while not alienating traditional users.

- **Solution: the Discovery Centre Programme**

The public were consulted widely to find out what people thought about libraries and what they would like to see in them.

As the word 'library' has a very marked but often negative association for people, especially among young non-users, a bold decision was made to rename, rebrand and rethink the service and to.

- take advantage of every opportunity to co-locate other services, such as a museum, an art gallery, a performance area, a learning suite, a coffee / snack bar
- fully embrace new technology
- offer a co-ordinated & well publicised programme of regular events & activities
- aim for an entirely new 'feel' in terms of colour, décor and furnishings,

- **Outcomes**

Gosport Library was turned into Gosport Discovery Centre. Figures for the new DC showed a steep and sustained rise in usage. There was also evidence of much greater usage of the building by young people and families. Surveys indicate generally high levels of satisfaction with many positive quotes from individuals.

- **Going Forward**

Hampshire has just opened a new £8 million Discovery Centre in Winchester, building on the experience and lessons of Gosport. All early indications are that it will be a great success.

Case Study 2: Books On Prescription

- **Key Issues**

People with mild to moderate mental health problems rarely if ever receive specialist treatment from trained therapists. Most only visit their GPs and are frequently prescribed medication which:

- is of limited effectiveness
- can be delayed in its action
- has unwanted side effects
- does not actively engage the patient in the treatment
- is expensive

The scale of the problem is immense: 25% of all consultations in primary care have a significant mental health component.

- **Solution: Partnership between Health and Library Services**

Self-help manuals based on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy techniques have been proven to be at least as effective in their patient outcomes as medication and with none of the negative aspects.

Libraries working in partnership with the NHS and other organisations can ensure that patients are guided towards the very best self-help manuals and enabled to borrow them quickly and easily through a book prescription agreement.

- **Outcomes**

'Books on Prescription' schemes are operating successfully throughout Hampshire.

Two main indicators are used to measure growth and effectiveness:

- number of GP surgeries and health centres adopting the scheme
- feedback from users via the unique Hants prescription / evaluation card

External funding has been received for the design and printing of a Hants Prescriber Pack.

Revised BoP WebPages are now available on the library website using the new graphic designs.

- **Going Forward**

Library service development staff are signing up more surgeries.

There are plans to expand the range of titles and scope of the scheme. Links have now been made with the newly formed Hants Primary Care Trust and a new cross-sectoral bibliotherapy group is about to be formed.

Case Study 3: New Joining Procedures / Library Access Card

- **Key Issues**

Through observation and consultation it was recognised that library joining forms together with the requirement to produce written evidence of name and address, were presenting a significant barrier to potential customers, particularly disadvantaged ones eg:

- people with literacy problems
- people whose first language was not English
- people with housing and employment problems

It was also recognised that print-disabled people, particularly those with learning disabilities, were being penalised by having to pay for the only kind of library items accessible to them – music CDs, audio books, DVDs, video games. Consequently these group were not adequately represented among library users.

- **Solution: Easy Joining / Access Card**

The Library Management Team agreed to a new set of joining procedures which included waiving the requirement to show evidence of name and address. Library staff are now filling out the joining form straight onto screen, on behalf of members of the public

A new 'Access Card' concession was introduced for print-disabled people, allowing them to borrow two income-generating items free of charge. Moreover there is no requirement to produce evidence of disability. Also card holders do not have to pay overdue charges.

- **Outcomes**

The changes were introduced smoothly with no evidence of significant abuse of the new system.

There has been a very positive reaction from users, especially from:

- disabled people
- the parents of disabled children
- colleagues working for Adult (Social) Services in the fields of visual impairment and learning disabilities

- **Going Forward**

Take-up of the Access Card has been very good and we would like to improve it still further by producing publicity that is more accessible. We have already employed a professional photographer to do a photo-shoot with a group of people with learning disabilities and the pictures will be used for a new minimal text leaflet and webpage.

Case Study 4: IT Classes for VIPs

- **Key Issues**

The very popular People's Network of free public access computers in libraries was not being used by many visually impaired people. Initially only one terminal at each service point was equipped with the necessary hardware and software and there was no training available.

- **Solution: IT4VIPs**

We began by upgrading our software agreement to a global licence, allowing us to offer the high quality / high cost program Supernova on every single terminal in the network.

Next we recruited a retired teacher, who is himself visually impaired and a user of the Supernova program, to develop and deliver a course tailored to the needs of individual VIPs. He has also produced a training course for library staff to enable them to give basic support.

- **Outcomes**

Weekly 'IT4VIPs' classes take place in Alton, Basingstoke, Eastleigh and Romsey libraries.

An independent report on IT provision for VIPs in libraries concluded that Hampshire and Portsmouth are regional leaders in this field. Another independently commissioned report, looking at Generic Social Outcomes from the Alton class, concluded that the training produced a significant enhancement of well being for the learners in addition to proven learning outcomes.

One of the learners at Alton has progressed over two years from almost no knowledge of computers or Supernova to a position where he now feels he can 'fly solo'. We will be nominating him for the Adult Learner of the Year Award 2008.

The classes make extensive use of volunteers who derive great satisfaction from helping disadvantaged people to access computers.

- **Going Forward**

In 2008 two new classes will begin, one at the new Winchester Discovery Centre and one at New Milton Library.

We are always looking for 'super volunteers' who can be trained up to deliver the classes independently. In this way we hope to achieve county-wide coverage.