

## **Explore York Libraries and Archives Mutual Ltd**

### **Overview**

We have had an exciting summer with new services opening, successful grant awards and a wonderful Summer Reading Challenge.

### **Highlights**

- 4,021 children took part in the Summer Reading Challenge
- Finance Manager appointed
- Monthly Community Member newsletter established
- Developing a new Explore Centre at Burnholme
- New reading café at Homestead Park launched
- Adult Learners Awards ceremony at York Explore celebrated adult learners achievements
- Big City Read launched – Pat Barker’s Regeneration
- Improvements to the layout at York Explore
- Arts Council award for a 3 year project at York Explore
- Wellcome Trust funding over 2 years to conserve and make the workhouse records accessible
- Animation weekend at York Explore using creative reinterpretation of the archives
- New archives advisory group formed to fundraise for the archive
- Clifton children’s library improved through a generous donation

### **National Influence**

Our Chief Executive attended a round table discussion with the Minister for Civil Society and the Minister for the Cabinet to discuss how the Government can support mutuals and encourage more to “spin out”. Most of the mutuals so far are in the area of health and social care and so Explore has a different experience of it from a cultural point of view. The new Head of the Mutual Support Team, Jonathan Lindley came up to York for a half day to find out more about us and listen to how Government can support us. Theresa May mentioned her support for mutuals in her inaugural speech as Prime Minister and so there will be lots happening nationally to support services spinning out. Two other library services became mutuals in April and so there are now 4 of us. We are already developing ways to work together and support other library services who may be thinking of a change.

We would like to offer our learning and knowledge to any council service who is considering such a change.

### **Partnership with Joseph Rowntree**

We are working with Joseph Rowntree in many ways now as we plan a potential move to the Folk Hall and open a new reading café in Homestead Park. At the end of May we opened a new Reading Café in Homestead Park. Working with Joseph Rowntree Foundation, we wanted to see if a reading café would be successful in this park as it has been in Rowntree Park. It certainly has been and we have extended the original contract to December. Staff have loved working there and people are enjoying the books and activities as well as the coffee and cakes! JRF created willow figures from Roald Dahl's books around the park. The success shows the appeal of a reading café and the income enables us to develop further services.

### **Digital Inclusion in New Earswick**

We are providing regular digital support sessions at the new Digital Hub in New Earswick. The free sessions are much the same as we provide in libraries, including Explore the Internet, introductions to social media, streaming media, e-reading, tablets and other resources. The sessions are taking place at various times, with some evening sessions to provide more flexibility for local people.

Talk Talk are using the hub to provide support with and sell their ultra-fast broadband service, whilst JRF and Explore are providing the basic IT support. We are working with JRF to research the digital needs of local people via surveys and events – this is very much the start of a wider engagement for 2017, which will inform the support we might offer at the Folk Hall from 2018. The hub is open until December.

Our strong relationship with JRF on a digital inclusion level is important as it will contribute to larger projects for the future, especially with regard to addressing isolation and poverty in our communities. We have been discussing plans for future sessions in retirement homes and sheltered housing, digital roadshows, digital history projects and digital clinics.

### **Summer Reading Challenge**

The Challenge this year was in celebration of Roald Dahl's centenary. The Big Friendly Read has been our best ever year with activities and prizes for children taking part.

Every year we hear stories of how children who had not thought of themselves as readers have been inspired by the challenge. Here is one:

*“A Father and son came in on Friday evening to tell me about all six of his books. He went through each of the books, what he thought about them, what had happened in them. While we sorted out his prizes his father told me that the boy had Aspergers and had never been a reader much but the challenge had really inspired him, and he had made sure to get all the books done so he could collect everything. He was thrilled by his certificate and medal.”*

## Volunteers

This year we worked with local secondary schools, the Sixth Form College, and both York Universities to recruit volunteers to help us deliver the challenge. As well as getting new volunteers we asked current volunteers if they would help as well.

We had 52 young volunteers helping through the summer. Volunteers are now essential to delivering the challenge successfully and we get some lovely feedback from library staff and customers. The children love having someone to take time to listen to them and help them choose books and help them at events. The volunteers also get a lot out of the experience:

*“My time over the past few years as a Reading Hack has been utterly fantastic. To see kids so enthused about reading and knowing you're a part of that is immensely fulfilling and hearing the kids' views on books you read at that age is fascinating. It's great to recommend books that you're later told are their favourite books and to be given recommendations in return! Being a part of the local community has also meant a lot to me too and the other volunteers have been absolutely wonderful in giving me help, support, and lots and lots of cake. To be given the opportunity to be a part of the reading challenge has been just great, especially having done it a lot as a kid myself.”*

## Schools

We worked closely with schools before the end of the summer term, to promote the challenge, and information was sent to schools by the Primary school improvement consultant. All primary schools had already been 'mapped' to their local libraries, who contacted them during the summer term to offer an SRC assembly or class visit. This year 40 York primary schools accepted our offer of a visit specifically to promote the SRC. Some schools

were unable to fit in a special SRC assembly, but all primary schools were offered promotional materials, including personal invitations for all pupils.

The Schools Cup was won by a very close margin this year. It will be presented to Acomb Primary who achieved 34% of their children completing the challenge.

### Age of Participants

Here is a breakdown of ages taking part in both challenges.

| Age           | Participants | Completers  |
|---------------|--------------|-------------|
| Not specified | 283          | 126         |
| 0-3           | 477          | 188         |
| 4-7           | 1749         | 1012        |
| 8-11          | 1398         | 767         |
| 12-16         | 101          | 50          |
| Over 16       | 13           | 3           |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>4021</b>  | <b>2146</b> |

### Books

As in previous years, we adopted the ethos of 'any book counts', and there is evidence that this is helpful in encouraging many children to read, as they are freed from the need to aim for 'the next level' and can just read for pleasure.

### Children's Issue Figures for the period of the Summer Reading Challenge

A total of 56,022 children's items were borrowed over the period 15<sup>th</sup> July to 16<sup>th</sup> September, which break down as below. This counts for a 9 week period. This is up on last year when is in a 10 week period over the summer we issued 57,989 items.

| C-PLAYA WAY                     | JR-AUDIO BK | JR-FIC-PB | JR-FICTION | JR-LPRINT | JR-NON FIC | PICTUR E-BK | TEEN AGE | Total |
|---------------------------------|-------------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|-------------|----------|-------|
| 294                             | 610         | 19928     | 3290       | 99        | 6140       | 16184       | 2071     | 55375 |
| Overdrive childrens ebooks      |             |           |            | 372       |            |             |          |       |
| Overdrive childrens eaudiobooks |             |           |            | 248       |            |             |          |       |
| OneClick childrens eaudiobooks  |             |           |            | 27        |            |             |          |       |
|                                 |             |           |            | 647       |            |             |          |       |

## New Library Membership

Due to the Summer Reading Challenge 199 children joined the library so that they could take part and 31 adults joined as their children were joining.

## Events

As well as running the Summer Reading Challenge we ran activities in every library. We launched by having a Flash Read on the 15<sup>th</sup> July, when we asked schools and individuals to read or do a reading activity and tweet about it at 11 am or as near to this as they could. We invited classes and held under 5 sessions in libraries that were open. In total, including our celebrations we will have run 113 events, some charged but many free so that no one is excluded. A comment received on this:

*“I would like to take this opportunity to say how brilliant the reading challenge was this year. Also how great all the activities were and how well they linked together and were organised. As a single parent with two children the low cost was great too. I was able to book in my girls for some and then plan our summer around them. I also liked the link with the Arts award (my girls completed that too) It was also good that some activities were open without booking.”*

## Toy Library

Issues of toys: 15/16 = 676, 16/17 up to end of Quarter two = 550  
The figures show that the use of the service is growing and that we are seeing a seasonal borrowing trend with less going out over the summer period, when presumably children are playing outside and on holiday.

We are using the toys that are not on loan at play mornings in some libraries e.g. Acomb on Wednesday mornings, to help parents come together and help isolation that many feel. Toys are then available to see and loan after the session.

## Big City Read

This year's book is Regeneration by Pat Barker and we have 5,000 copies to give away. We launched it in early October and there is a wonderful programme of events to support it. The theme is First World War, pacifism, mental health and poetry.

## **Digital Archives**

At present we care for hard copy Council records according to international standards for storage, cataloguing and conservation. We have established mechanisms for preserving and providing access to these unique and valuable archives. Increasingly however, the Council creates its records digitally and manages them through proprietary software that presents new challenges. These documents will be the archives of the future but they are currently in unarchivable formats. We are beginning to develop a strategy for preserving and giving access to these archives in the long term. This is imperative for ongoing business use by Council officers and also for maintaining the historical record of York as a developing and changing city.

Without action in the next 3 years we may be looking at a 'black hole' in the city's record as well as reputational loss.

There are innovative cloud-based solutions available for digital archives that ensure they can be accessed quickly and efficiently by Council Officers and (where appropriate) the public, even when formats and software have become obsolete. Our City Archivist will prepare a detailed options report for April 2017.

## **Inclusive Arts and Media**

Our bid to the Arts Council for a three year programme to establish York Explore as an inclusive, accessible, creative, cultural space in the city centre has been successful. This is a major undertaking and we are beginning with developing an audience development plan to better understand who our audiences are and how to communicate with them. The first workshop was an animation weekend for children as part of the Summer Reading Challenge. It is being premiered in December and will appear on Youtube etc. The children taking part have asked us to set up an animation club at the library. They worked with the Hunt Collection from the archive and have made Reginald Hunt come to life in clay! There is more work planned to creatively reinterpret the archives to involve people of all ages.

## **Governance**

We continue to strengthen our governance arrangements. All Community Members now receive a monthly newsletter updating them on projects and activities. We are recruiting new Board members and will have a refreshed Board going into 2017. This gives us a good opportunity to introduce people with new skills and experience. Our latest recruit is Jo North who owns the

Big Bang Partnership. She has a lot of experience in being on a Board and in workforce development.

## **Feedback Policy**

We have renewed our policy to show the steps to take if someone has a complaint. We receive feedback in a number of different ways:

- Informal comments made to frontline staff
- Surveys
- Responses to consultation
- Written comments by email and letter
- Evaluation from events and activities

The vast majority of comments are positive or easily answered questions and are dealt with at the library where they occur. We have had some recent comments around poor customer service which we are dealing with. Also data protection issues have been raised as a result of an online consultation in August about the possibility of putting anonymised data from our book borrowing records on the York Open Data Platform. We followed the Information Commissioners Office standards and guidance in big data and anonymisation and undertook a privacy impact assessment to ensure that we were following good practice. We also worked closely with CYC's Business Intelligence Hub on the proposal. We received a number of responses querying this proposal and so we decided against going ahead with it at this time. It is very important to us that our users have confidence in the way we protect their data and we work to very high standards and to that end we have also begun a full review of all Explore processes and policies using CILIP's toolkit User Privacy in Libraries. Our Chief Executive has spoken with the President of the Society of Chief Librarians and between them they have asked the National Libraries Taskforce set up by the DCMS to take on a piece of work looking at this in partnership with other relevant national bodies to instigate a full debate.

We have just undertaken a Plus Library User Survey (PLUS) across all libraries. This is a national survey administered by CIPFA. We are awaiting the full analysis but already have some positive quotes.

*“The library is a vital element in the life of the community and the only social interactive space for many elderly residents.”*

*“The library plays a large part in my life; I would be lost without it.”*

## **Asset Development**

### Tang Hall Library

We are working with the council to develop a new Explore Centre at the Burnholme site. This presents us with an exciting opportunity to significantly improve our services to local people. The existing library at Tang Hall is no longer fit for purpose and work is currently underway to ensure the building's safety.

### Haxby and Wigginton Library

The library at Haxby became structurally unsafe in July and we had to move out over two weeks. Oaken Grove Community Centre came to our rescue with the offer of a room for the children's library so we could run the Summer Reading Challenge. Our mobile library has been visiting Haxby and Wigginton sites to provide additional cover. However, the service we are offering is not what we would choose. It has always been a very busy library well loved by local people and we felt very sad to be leaving it so quickly. But staff and public safety have always to be paramount.

The council have been very supportive and are giving us funding to procure a new mobile library. For the medium term, we plan to provide a mobile service that visits more places and stays for longer so we can provide opening hours similar to those before. Our staff have been amazing as always, and have worked so hard to make the changes as easy as possible for our users. The people of Haxby and Wigginton have also been very kind and understanding, given that the service available is not as good as it was.

A long term solution could be a new library as part of a development of the Memorial Hall. We are working with the Hall trustees and CYC and Haxby Town Council and Wigginton Parish Council on that.

We are establishing a Friends group to fundraise for new furniture and books for when we get a replacement building.

Explore is absolutely committed to a library and archive service for the people of Haxby and Wigginton. The library there has always been one of our busiest and we have always wanted to improve the services available so we are seeing this as our opportunity to do that. We will be conducting public consultation to begin a conversation about what is needed.

## **Workforce Development Strategy 2016-18**

Explore commissioned the Workforce Development Unit (WDU) of City of York Council to co-produce our first Workforce Development Strategy. This aligns closely with our business strategy and is designed to meet the Learning and Development needs of all staff, bring in new and different ways of learning and support the organisational development of Explore.

The work is wide ranging and includes activity to deliver the Explore value of being a learning organisation using reflective practice to develop and improve. Over time as the work embeds this will influence the way all staff feel and behave as they deliver high value service to individuals and communities while improving the way that Explore does business.

The strategy objectives are:

1. Create an inclusive approach to workforce development so the skills, talent, energy and commitment of the whole workforce are harnessed
2. Equip all staff with the skills they need to deliver Explores Business Strategy
3. Ensure Explore is fit for purpose as an independent mutual
4. Develop knowledge and skills in reflective practice so it becomes the way of doing business for all of Explore's workforce
5. Achieve external accreditation for investing in the workforce – paid and volunteer
6. Deliver the infrastructure needed to become a learning organisation

The strategy is supported by a comprehensive action plan that identifies the need to both 'get the basics right' and use learning as a tool to develop all staff and grow Explore commercially.

The strategy was based on the findings of:

- Individual discussions with the Chief Executive, Head of Strategy and Operations and Staff Director
- Collective discussion with the Explore Management Team
- Feedback from the staff engagement visits in Autumn 2015 by the Head of Strategy and Operations and Staff Director
- A skills audit questionnaire sent to all Explore paid staff in October 2015
- Feedback from workshops delivered at the Annual Explore Staff Conference December 2015

Since January 2016 implementation of the action plan has been lead by the Chief Operating Officer via the Staff Advisory Group and includes delivery of:

- a new Personal Development Plan system
- provision of training in health and safety
- Strategic Management Team development
- review of staff performance data
- development of a Health and Wellbeing survey for December 2016

Explore continues to work in partnership with WDU in the implementation of the strategy. We are enjoying working with the staff in WDU and improvements can already be felt with staff identifying the different skills needed to work in a different organisation.

## **Finance**

We have just appointed a new Finance Manager and are pleased to welcome Alan Wadsworth to our Explore family. We are developing our growth plan for the next five years and this post is central to our commitment to a robust financial plan.

We have recently been audited for 2015/16 with no major issues.

We were successful with our application for charitable status. This has allowed us to begin a philanthropic strategy to raise funds. We have also been successful in applying for business rate relief from the council.

## **Volunteers**

The number of volunteers continues to grow (258) and they help us to deliver a wide range of events as well as helping with the day to day stuff. Clifton Library staff have written the following to show the valuable contribution made by our volunteers.

Generally at Clifton we currently have Volunteer shelvers, storytellers, Reading Group volunteer, Events volunteers & "General. Having shelvers means we can spend more time with customers, working on stock and planning events, displays etc. Story time volunteers mean we can run regular story sessions even when we are single staffed where we would have to break off every 5 minutes to deal with other customers.

Our Reading Group volunteer liaises with staff regarding books the group are reading and facilitates the session, meaning staff input is minimum. Events Volunteers provided support at our children's event and at craft fairs,

including helping get materials ready, helping set up and pack up after craft fairs, running tombola stalls etc all of which would not be possible if we were just relying on our branch staffing.

Recently volunteers have come in and helped to paint the library as part of our makeover. They are also coming in to help staff pack up the books before we close for the carpet fitting. They are a valuable resource that we now couldn't imagine being without. Certainly at Clifton we feel that they are part of our team.

## **Performance**

Overall the number of visits is up 8% on last year. Book issues are down 1%, but there are increases at some libraries and in some formats. Ebook and audio download borrowing continues to grow massively, up 44% on last year. Book issues are also up at York Explore (4%) which shows the success of the recent changes to the layout and display of stock. Loan of toys is up by 113%. There are a few libraries who are struggling and we are planning interventions to look in detail at those communities to see how we can improve. Haxby's figures are significantly down as would be expected by the sudden closure in July. New Earswick is showing an increase of 32% of book issues as expected as it has longer opening hours to counter the closure of Haxby. We will be redrafting the targets for Haxby for the medium term whilst we find a long term solution. See Appendix 2 for more detailed figures, which are also on our website.

## **Looking Ahead**

We have our second AGM on 14 November 2016 and we are looking forward to meeting our Community Members and showcasing our work.

We have been working on a new five year strategy. Austerity has had a huge impact on libraries across the country. Explore has been successful in keeping all libraries open and indeed expanding the offer through a new reading café at Homestead Park. The future remains uncertain with exit from Europe high on the government's agenda. There will be as yet unknown impacts on local government from this and so on Explore. The only certainty is that there will be more change and a need to continue to reduce budgets. We want to be ready to seize opportunity where it appears and improve our services along with sound financial management

Our vision remains the same

*"To enable everyone to lead fuller, more connected and engaged lives"*

We have identified 5 key objectives to deliver the vision

- To be a strong and sustainable organisation
- To share the joy of reading with everyone
- To be the focal point of communities, building resilience and engagement
- To contribute to everyone's health and wellbeing
- To be places of learning, creativity and discovery

**Appendices:**

**Appendix 1** – Archives Access Plan 2016 Qtr3

**Appendix 2** – Performance Round Up April – Sept 2016