

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

Against a national picture of library closures, Explore continues to provide staffed services across the city. The summer has been a busy one with the annual Summer Reading Challenge. We are now looking towards autumn with an exciting programme of events at York Explore. This month we hold our first AGM for Explore Members.

Over the next few months we will be welcoming some new members of staff who will help us take Explore forward into our third year outside the council.

We decided to create a post of York Explore Manager. The development of our flagship needed a figurehead to realise our ambitions for it. Barbara Swinn from Northamptonshire will be starting this month, she comes with a wealth of experience of working in libraries, providing services for Children's Centres and setting up enterprise zones in libraries. Her key task is to make York Explore a real part of the city centre, creating new partnerships and developing existing ones. Her appointment comes at a time when a York Business Improvement District (BID) is being voted on. Explore attended the launch of this and is in support of it.

We are currently recruiting for a Reader Development Librarian. This exciting job will lead on promoting the joy of reading to everyone in York. On a sadder note, we said goodbye to Anthony Sinnott, who has been working with the Chief Executive and Board since before the transfer. Anthony's contribution to Explore has been significant. He helped to set up the organisation and to establish its finances and governance. His post will soon be advertised.

Our Chief Executive has been voted onto the National Executive of the Society of Chief Librarians (SCL). There is a great deal happening at national level for public libraries as the Taskforce set up by DCMS gets into its stride.

## Highlights

- Summer Reading Challenge Record Breakers was very successful with 4,120 children taking part
- Over 30% increase in ebook lending
- 1,072 children attended activities through the summer
- Yornight (EU researchers night) on 25<sup>th</sup> September was a huge success with over 500 visitors. People were able to try out face morphing technology, Flying Scotsman cocktails, create their own family tree and interactive gaming on our new multi touch digital table! Bettany Hughes also took part talking about Making History Happen

## Finance

Our financial aims are to reduce our expenditure, increase our potential to raise income and increase the amount of money we receive from a variety of funding bids. Our finances are currently being audited. Having complete control over our finances is enabling us to better manage them and the flexibility we have enables us to receive best value from all our transactions.

We are starting to investigate new strands of financing. We will be bidding into the Big Potential Lottery Fund. This is to enable organisations such as ourselves to become “social investment ready”.

We are now close to getting charitable status, which will allow us to develop a philanthropy strategy.

## Home Library Service

Explore has a statutory duty to deliver library services to the whole population of York. This duty includes the provision of services to residents who have difficulties accessing mainstream library provision. We are working with the Royal Voluntary Service (RVS) as a key partner agency. We are funding a part time post to deliver in the following areas:

- RVS volunteers deliver books and other literary material to housebound people. We want to increase the number of people accessing this service

- Recruitment and training of volunteers to provide support to help housebound people to get online. We will provide tablets and laptops for this purpose.
- As far as is possible, we want to facilitate people coming into libraries for coffee mornings and other events
- We currently deliver boxes of books to Elderly People's Homes. We want to expand this service through volunteers to facilitate reading groups and help people get online. We also want to enable individuals to choose their own books rather than just have a box to pick from
- RVS will be providing training to our staff in dementia awareness

### **Inclusive Arts and Media**

Explore has a strong commitment to inclusive arts and has been working on a variety of projects. There is a full listing of these in Annex 1. Highlights are a 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. The bid will be submitted before Christmas. In the meantime we are delivering the successful bid from CYC Delivery of Innovation Fund. Lab46 will pilot the use of emerging touch screen technology, to connect people with media, the arts, reading and learning in accessible and playful new ways and encourage co creation in shared spaces for social innovation and fun.

### **Children and Young People**

We have signed up to the national Children and Young People's Promise. This sets out the public library services offer to children and young people and has been devised by ASCEL (Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians).

- Every child and young person visiting a public library is inspired by an exciting accessible environment which makes reading for pleasure irresistible.
- They have the opportunity to engage with imaginative digital opportunities through public libraries, building their skills, knowledge and creativity.
- They will find a range of inclusive and diverse fiction and non-fiction books and other information resources to support growing confidence in literacy and formal and informal learning.

- They are able to take part in a wide range of literacy and cultural experiences including reading and book-based activities.
- They are actively involved in decisions about service developments and are offered opportunities to volunteer.
- They are supported through library services and activities to improve their health and wellbeing.

The Promise covers children and young people from birth to eighteen and sets out the “library journey” that children should experience as they grow. It also highlights how the Promise links to the national public library universal offers. Our contract is based on the universal offers (compiled by the Society of Chief Librarians)

The Summer Reading Challenge encourages children aged 4-11 to read six books through the summer. Prizes are given after each book, with a medal and certificate of completion at the end. The Challenge has been proven to help children keep up with their reading through the long break from school, enabling them to avoid a dip in their literacy level. We work with all the primary schools in York and award a cup to the school with the highest percentage of completers.

As well as encouraging children to enjoy reading, we work with young volunteers to put on a programme of events and activities in all of our libraries. Mad Hatter’s Tea Parties, Lego animation workshops, Pit Yourself Against a Record and Arts Award Mud Pie Arts drop ins were happening across York and thousands of children took part.

This year we also worked with partners, York Theatre Royal, York Museums Trust and the Minster to deliver activities around the Arts Award. This was part of a national pilot of partnership working supported by Cape UK. 40 children were successful (increase from 25 last year) and were awarded their Arts Award.

Our celebration event this year will be our biggest yet with 1,000 people attending! It is at the University this month and a fun afternoon with poetry and prizes is in store for children who completed the Challenge.

### **Chatterbooks:**

We run Chatterbooks reading groups for 7 – 12 year olds in four libraries, Acomb, Haxby, Tang Hall, Clifton and York. Chatterbooks is a national initiative from The Reading Agency and our groups have been chosen as Star Reviewers and will be reviewing books for the national

website. Being part of a reading group builds children's confidence and encourages them to read more widely and develop a lifelong reading habit.

### **Toy Library:**

The Toy Library was launched in May and has been a resounding success. York, Clifton and Acomb have the most borrowed toys, but most libraries are now issuing them. Since the launch we have issued 267 toys. We make a small charge of 50p per toy so have collected £133.50 which goes back into the collection and we are looking for additional ways to fund adding new toys to the collection.

### **Community Learning**

Explore continues to support community learning in many ways, not least by making spaces available to groups. For example, every month the Yorkshire Guild of Weavers, Spinners and Dyers set up their spinning wheels in the café at Acomb Explore and talk to people about how to spin wool.

As a member of the York Community Learning Partnership, we hosted the Adult Learner Awards in June at York Explore. It was a wonderful evening celebrating adult learning and the amazing learners. It is always very humbling to read the nominations about how people overcome so many difficulties to keep learning. We were especially proud as the Craft Club from Acomb Explore won the Informal Learning Group Award. The Club have been meeting at Acomb for some years and now have over 30 members. They are a really good example of how we support community groups. They learn from each other, whether it is how to knit socks or how to crochet and they support Acomb Explore. We have craft clubs at several of our libraries and the skill and expertise is simply staggering. Last year Copmanthorpe's group knitted them a sleigh with reindeers!

Our Mint Yard Lectures series has returned after a summer break with an exciting programme through the autumn. This series focuses on the history of York and the name is taken from the piece of land in which York Explore sits.

## **Archives**

The Gateway to History HLF project is now nearing its end. So much has been achieved and we are working now to ensure the legacy is assured. The archive is safely housed in a purpose built store and work continues on cataloguing to make more easily accessible to people.

What is next for the archive? We are submitting a bid to the Wellcome Trust, entitled Past Caring? : York City Health and Poor Law Records, 1837-2003. The project will catalogue and conserve over 100 metres of archive collections relating to health and poverty in the city of York between 1837 and 2003. The archives of the Poor Law Union and Workhouse, Medical Officer of Health, Department of Health and Department of Environmental Health and Housing will be sorted, described and made accessible to researchers for the first time. A structured online catalogue, indexed using standard and specialised thesauri, will allow records to be rapidly discovered. Essential preservation and conservation work will ensure that the 1479 bound volumes are in a fit state to use.

## **Digital Inclusion**

Explore is the Smart City lead for digital skills and engagement. We already work with many agencies across the city to help people get online. Libraries are uniquely placed to be the leading provider of basic digital support in the city. We have reach across all communities and provide free access to fixed PCs and WiFi, as well as ongoing support for all. In December we will be holding a workshop to promote and facilitate further collaboration.

We provide ongoing basics support internally with a core digital learning offer as well as frequent special events and involvement in delivery of national initiatives such as Get Online Week, Be Online Fortnight, Spring Online, 50+ Festival and Parliament Week. We are starting to work with Be Independent to lend Hudls to their clients who want to try out being online before committing to buying equipment.

## **Home Outreach**

As well as providing support in external public locations, we are beginning to enter people's homes to enable comprehensive access to basic digital support for people who are housebound. This will be delivered by a core team of digital champions, volunteers and Home

Library Service staff who will take mobile devices and mobile wifi routers into people's homes during routine visits to help them improve their health and wellbeing via digital resources. This supports independent living and opens a world of possibilities to people who are housebound, they can shop online, choose their own library books, skype their family

Public libraries are beginning to work nationally through The Society of Chief Librarians (SCL) to be a key provider for the Government Digital Service (GDS) to provide digital training and digital support services to reduce the number of digitally excluded people in the UK, by removing the barriers presented by lack of access, digital skills, vulnerability or motivation. In York, we already provide daily support for people in many ways. With more and more government services becoming available online there is an increasing need for digital assisted services. This involves more individual support and advanced training needs for our staff.

### **Survey of fixed PCs**

In August and September we conducted a survey of people using our fixed PCs. We wanted to know why people are using our PCs to see if the demand for them is falling as smartphones and tablets proliferate. What we discovered was that people use our PCs:

- Because we have a faster connection than they do at home
- They don't have a pc or internet connection at home
- For Word
- To apply for jobs
- For email
- To print as they no longer have printers at home
- For the bigger screen and keyboard to do things that are harder on tablets and smartphones
- To access services that we offer for free e.g. Ancestry and Which?

People are planning to continue to use the PCs for the foreseeable future and they are using them more than once a week.

This information is helping us to understand the importance of the fixed PCs and that they will continue to be needed over the next few years.

We have submitted a bid in partnership with the council's IT for £28k to upgrade the WiFi network. This is a national fund to ensure that all

libraries in the country have WiFi. We expect to hear if we have been successful later this month.

## **Performance**

As York was closed for seven months last year we need to compare our performance with 2013/14. In both visits and issues libraries are performing differently. Overall both are showing a decline – but that masks a more complex picture. Some of our smaller libraries are doing well. When we look at visits we can see that Acomb is up 14% and Huntington up 20%. Others are not performing as well, for instance Fulford down 28% and Strensall down 22%. Look at book issues and Fulford are 17% up and Haxby is 14% up. Down are Acomb 19% and Poppleton at 27%. There will be local factors to take into account and so our performance team are looking in depth at everything and we will be making a number of interventions.

Further investigation of book issues shows that ebook loans are up 123% whilst those of all other formats are down. Obviously there is a growing demand for ebooks and for audio downloads, but the actual numbers are small in comparison to the size of our printed stock, so it comes with a caveat. A recent national survey by the Bookseller of young people showed that they might prefer print books to ebooks. 64% preferred print compared to 16% who preferred ebooks.

An observational survey was done at York Explore in September by Sovibrant. We wanted to know where people went in the building and how easy they found it to find what they wanted. There was also a survey conducted outside in Library Square and at various other points in the city centre asking people if they knew where the library is and what they think the building is. The results show that there is a real lack of knowledge of both what the building contains and where the library and archive for the city is. People thought the building was the court, not open to the public or were just unsure. This shows the need for improved signage both on the front of the building and in Library Square to give it an open, approachable external look. We are writing a planning application for this signage. Internal signage is also needed to make it easier to find what you want, but also to discover other things in the true spirit of Explore. The adult fiction will be re-shelved to make it more appealing and the area given a light, airy feel.



Observation also showed that many people are put off by large groups of people who spend long periods of time in the Square. When they weren't there, more people stopped and looked or came in. This is a continuation of the anti social behaviour we have suffered from this year. The hoarding cutting off half of the Square is creating a bottleneck and it is often difficult to make your way through. We are working with Police and other agencies, but we need a better, more permanent solution. Perhaps removal of the benches until the building work next door is completed would help. It can be frustrating for the staff who face this daily and spend time dealing with negative incidents.

### **Looking ahead**

There are many events at York Explore this autumn, something for everyone. The Bloodaxe Reading Challenge begins for children. This works with York Archaeological Trust and continues through to February and the Viking Festival. We are starting to plan next summer's reading activities – the return of the Big City Read and another Reading Challenge.