

Scrutiny Report – Explore York Libraries and Archives

January 2019

Explore's vision is:

“To enable everyone to lead fuller, more connected and engaged lives”

1. Our key objectives in delivering that vision are:
 - 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

2. Our last Scrutiny report was in May 2018 and there have been a lot of things happening since then.
 - Burnholme Centre has opened with a new home for Tang Hall Library
 - New Earswick Library moved into the Folk Hall
 - The Big City Read centred on Matt Haig's *The Radleys*
 - Summer Reading Challenge celebrated 80 years of *The Beano*

Centre at Burnholme

3. The opening was on 23rd June amidst much celebration and excitement. Local people are delighted with the new facilities and the centre is always busy with double the footfall of the old Tang Hall Library. Our partners in the centre are York Community Church, York Learning, Tang Hall SMART, a nursery and United Response. We want to work with all our partners to provide a centre with a wide range of activity for everyone, where everyone feels included.

4. We have set up a Visa application station under contract to Libraries Connected. The station has biometric equipment and our staff have been trained to support people's applications. As well as being a good income generator for us, this also shows how libraries can provide support for government services, both national and local.

5. The reading cafe in the centre provides a wonderful Sunday lunch and monthly music recitals in partnership with SMART.
6. Work continues on the site as the care home and other health facilities are built. The centre acts to bring all activity together and is fast becoming the place where local people meet up.

New Earswick Library

7. We moved the library into the Folk Hall at the end May 2018. The work on the Hall wasn't completed until later and so there was a grand reopening in September with the CEO of JRF inviting all the local residents to come and see the new facilities. It is a joyous partnership – the library is not just in one place, but across the whole Hall e.g books in the cafe and upstairs in the nooks and crannies. Our aim is for people to discover books and reading wherever they are and it is working very well. The library can be open now all the time the Hall is – massively increasing open hours and allowing people to choose the most convenient time for them to visit.
8. We are working with local people to capture their stories of the village over the years to put in the archive.

Haxby and Wigginton Library

9. We have found a new home for Haxby and Wigginton Library with the scouts at Ethel Ward Playing Fields. We are working with the council and the scouts to design a building that will meet all our needs. The mobile that currently serves Haxby and Wigginton does a good job, but is no substitute for a static library. The Friends group there are raising funds to ensure that the new library is state of the art. It is wonderful to have a good, positive outcome to the problems we have experienced since the old library became unsafe and we had to leave.

Summer Reading Challenge

10. Mischief Makers was a real success. It celebrated 80 years of The Beano and we had lots of Dennis the Menace's in our libraries. Acomb Primary School won the Schools' Cup for the third year in a row. They had the highest number of children taking part and completing the Challenge.

11. Overall 3,477 children took part with 1,712 completing the 6 stages of the Challenge. We offered a visit to every primary school in the city and we visited 40 schools to promote the Challenge and invite children to take part. 123 volunteers helped us to deliver the Challenge, 39 of whom were under 19. We put on 48 events with 1,076 children attending. There were events at every library with a big celebration end event at Burnholme in the main hall.
12. Next year the Challenge will celebrate 50 years since the Moon landings with a Space Chase. We are talking to the physics department at the University of York about how we can work with them to deliver some exciting activities.

Reading Pictures Seeing Stories Festival

13. We partnered with 14 of the authorities in Yorkshire and Humber to deliver this Arts Council funded festival. Its aim was to encourage children who don't engage with art and culture to attend some events and experience something new. Our staff commissioned local artists to work with children. The response was very positive – for some parents, this was their first event at a library and they were really pleased that their child had access to these events. It showed that libraries often provide children with their first experience of a cultural activity. 109 children and 72 adults took part.
14. We held 14 events for the festival
 - Four Shadow Puppetry workshops
 - Two sock puppet workshops
 - One mosaic making Workshop
 - Four Put yourself in the picture Workshops
 - One Tale of Tang Hall art drop in
 - One Understated Ladybird animation workshop
 - One Animal crafts and stories workshop
15. Liz Foster, one of the artists said –

“I really enjoy working with Explore. I have found that each centre is very welcoming and friendly. I am often provided with a volunteer helper which is great, as well as the staff, who are always on hand to make sure I've got what I need. As a self-employed artist, working with an organisation such as Explore offers me the opportunity to add to

my teaching portfolio- It also helps me build a relationship with the public who may not have been to a previous event of mine. Placing arts activities in Explore centres is a great opportunity to both provide affordable access to the arts for families and to provide quality paid employment for regional artists.”

Big City Read

16. Our book this year was Matt Haig’s *The Radleys*, about a family of vampires who live in Bishopthorpe. Matt had just published his latest book ‘Notes From a Nervous Planet’ which was at the top of the Sunday Times bestseller list, so we were very lucky to have him. The events and activities around the theme were very popular – one was the showing of a horror film in the undercroft of St Leonards. It was sold out and very popular.
17. As always, we gave out 5,000 copies of the book at libraries and York Railway Station, York Theatre Royal, West Offices, Sainsbury Monks Cross, Tesco Askham Bar, Tesco Clifton Moor Job Centre Plus, Monkgate, Shambles Market Giveaway and City Screen.
18. We delivered a 2 month programme of 120 events and activities in the city. We encouraged people to read the book, explore its themes, read more widely and more often and discover ways to improve their own mental health through reading and participating in creative activities in libraries and partner venues.
19. We partnered with Riding Lights Theatre Company and received funding from the Arts Council to deliver a piece of pop up participatory theatre in all of Explore’s premises and Askham Grange HMP. It was anticipated that this would be 20 performances in 20 venues over a 3 week period. Matt Haig’s “Reasons To Stay Alive” was the starting point for the creation of a play which aimed to examine and demonstrate the power of reading to enhance and improve health and wellbeing. In this way we would be using a fiction and a non-fiction work by the same author as part of the BCR
20. We commissioned playwright Bridget Foreman to write a play and the provisionally named “Reasons To Stay Alive Tour” became “Surprise Ending”. The play features 2 characters Pop and Smidge, a grandfather and granddaughter who, through a major life event for each of them, find that reading aloud and together enables them to live

better lives, to reconnect with each other and to improve their own sense of wellbeing.

21. We followed the original Activity Plan with the exception that the writing period was longer than anticipated, meaning that the activities that followed were delayed. The performances were actually delivered from 10 to 30 October.
22. There were minor changes to the artistic team from the original application, Sean Cavanagh took responsibility for costumes and props in addition to set design, Patrick Burbridge took the role of Musical Director and the two actors appointed were Rachel Hammond and Varujan Smallwood. We also used a BSL interpreter for one of the performances.
23. When we began scheduling performances into venues, it became clear that we had capacity to deliver more than the original 20 planned in the 15 day time period without impacting on expenditure. We added 2 venues, a village hall and a care home which are usually served by our mobile library, a community centre in a housing estate, a hospice, Riding Lights' theatre on Friargate and 5 independent living schemes (formerly sheltered housing). The additional venues allowed us to reach further into communities and include older, socially isolated people and people who were not able to get to a library. The final number of performances was 28 in 26 venues.
24. Quotes from participants showed that people look forward to this event every year, they realise the importance of reading and sharing that experience with others. Response to the play was amazing – it touched people's hearts and showed how a simple 1 hour performance with minimal props can deliver a powerful message.

Fun Palaces

25. In October all of our libraries became Fun Palaces for a weekend. Fun Palaces are a national event where communities come together to put on a range of activities. They can be anywhere and for us libraries are the obvious place. So we hand over our libraries to local people who can deliver learning sessions e.g our craft clubs teach how to knit or crochet and others teach how to code or make robots etc. The

weekends are very popular and the number of activities grows each year.

26. This supports our objective of self directed learning - enabling local people to share their skills with others.

Archives

27. We won funding to catalogue and conserve the council's engineers plans – called “On The Drawing Board”, this money will help us to know what we have and it will mean that the council's officers will have easier access to plans and drawings from across the city. A team of volunteers is working with an archivist at the old Tang Hall library building – a comment from one was that there are a lot of sewers! Seriously though, this collection has been poorly neglected over the years to the point where it is all but impossible to find what is needed in a timely manner. Many of the plans are in Deepstore and so our archivists will be visiting the salt mine to extract the remaining boxes. There are some beautiful drawings and images, one of a public toilet that was never built, but is there as a reminder of past planning.

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Abbreviations

CEO- Chief Executive Officer
BCR - Big City Read
BSL – British Sign Language
JRF – Joseph Rountree Foundation
HMS- Her Majesty's Prison Service
SMART- Tang Hall SMART CIC