

## **Explore York Libraries and Archives**

May 2017 Bi-annual Update

### **Strong and Sustainable Organisation**

Explore's vision is:

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

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

### **Performance**

We have been focusing on measuring our actual performance and benchmarking that against the national picture. Annex 1 shows the trends from 10/11 to 16/17 for visits and book issues.

The national picture shows a decline in both these areas. Explore is reporting a more positive picture of rising visits alongside a rising population and a beginning of an increase in book issues. We are very ambitious to continue this trend and are setting up two new Advisory Groups to focus on Reading and York Explore. These will be chaired by Board members with the support of staff and we will invite a range of partners to attend. The York Explore group will work on how to increase visits; the Reading one on how to share the joy of reading.

### **90<sup>th</sup> Birthday celebrations**

York Explore was opened for the first time in 1927 and so we are celebrating its 90<sup>th</sup> birthday. There will be a programme of activity and events, looking at how libraries are even more relevant and important than they were then. We are also challenging staff to read 1,927 books in a year.

## **Share the joy of reading**

The 2016 Big City Read book was Pat Barker's *Regeneration*. This event has now become one of the key cultural highlights of York's year with thousands of people taking part across the whole city. This year's programme was one of our best ever. Wendy Kent, our Reading Development Librarian worked with a wide range of partners to develop a programme that encouraged people to learn about some of the different aspects of the First World War such as pacifism and mental health. Topics that are especially relevant to York.

Pat Barker was very generous with her time and gave thought provoking talks, encouraging people to consider how fiction allows us to tackle complex issues. This is especially relevant in today's world where people are searching for easy solutions.

The full report is in annex 2. For 2017, we have chosen Helen Cadbury's *To Catch a Rabbit*. Helen lives in York and is very involved in the cultural and literary life of the city and we are absolutely delighted that she has accepted our invitation to be our Big City Read author. The project will launch on 14<sup>th</sup> September and continue to 10<sup>th</sup> November and we will be distributing 5,000 free copies of the book as usual.

## **1984**

On 6<sup>th</sup> June the Orwell Prize will be doing a livestream of a reading of George Orwell's book *1984*. It will be at the Senate House, University of London and the readings will be done by a range of actors and journalists. To celebrate this event, we are holding 2 events in partnership with the University of York and York St John University.

## **Focal point of communities**

We have undertaken a large amount of work to learn more about our communities and how they use us, as well as what might encourage them to use us more.

## **Public Library User Survey (PLUS)**

PLUS is run by CIPFA and surveys who is visiting and why. We last did one 10 years ago and it is interesting to compare the results. The survey is delivered at libraries using a paper questionnaire. The resulting data is very rich and detailed and will inform how we move forward. There are also free

text questions which cover all aspects of the service. We have asked each library to respond to these questions and comments so people can see that we are listening and making changes. A large percentage of the comments reflect the value that the public place on library staff that they know and engage with. Reading through all the comments brings home to you how important libraries are and what a difference they make to communities and all ages. See annex 3 for a summary of the results.

We worked with **The Audience Agency** to understand who our audiences are and how to develop and grow them. The work was focused on York Explore, but reports were also run for all libraries.

The data is based on Audience Spectrum, which is a population profiling tool which describes attendance, participation and engagement with the arts, museums and heritage as well as behaviours, attitudes and preferences towards such organisations. They haven't been working with libraries for very long and so it was an innovative approach for us. For further information on the approach see: [www.theaudienceagency.org.uk](http://www.theaudienceagency.org.uk)

For York Explore, they took postcodes for active borrowers from the whole service and information from our PLUS survey. We did this to include as many of our users as possible as active borrowers counts only those who have borrowed a book or used the PCs over the last year. The results are being used by York's staff to match events to potential audiences.

The reports run for all the other libraries are slightly different. There we just used the audience segmentation for the library's catchment area. It is really interesting to see how this equates to our knowledge of areas and the two together are helping us to focus our marketing and events.

## **Toy Library**

Our Board have voted to make this service free of charge at point of delivery from 1 June 2017. This is to encourage as many families as possible to take part, reducing barriers to services is very important to us and we have a long term ambition to stop charging overdue charges.

We are looking for grants to replace and buy new items, especially for more toys for children with disabilities. These are often expensive and so we help parents to "try before they buy", or just to add variety for their children. We also want to buy Fidget toys to help children with autism with concentration and anxiety. Play is important to gain essential skills, such as reading, writing and numeracy. It helps with motor skills and can also help a child

deal with emotions or a traumatic situation e.g. if a family member has been hospitalised due to illness, it may benefit the child to play with a toy hospital. Play also assists social development, helping tolerance, sharing and problem solving. This is particularly important for disadvantaged children.

### **Police Drop In**

At Acomb Explore we are trialling a Police “drop in” every Friday. We were approached by the Police as they are looking for somewhere in Acomb to be available to the public. They find that people are reluctant to be seen going into the Police Station and that a popular community space is ideal to encourage people to talk to them about their concerns.

### **Haxby Mobile**

The new mobile is nearly ready to launch. The livery has been completed and we are now waiting on the IT network work. We anticipate the launch at the end of May. It will be able to offer a better service to Haxby and Wigginton as we wait for the new building to be ready.

## **Contribute to Everyone’s Health & Wellbeing**

### **Boccia at Acomb Explore**

Working with the Council’s Wellness Team, we are running some Boccia sessions at Acomb Explore. It has been hugely successful and we had to add a second session. Last week there was a tournament and people came from all over York to take part. The library was very lively and the visit count was double its usual Friday number. We already have another one planned for September. This shows how successful our Explore Centres are at encouraging lots of different people to come together, meet new people and take part in activities. We are investigating whether other libraries want to hold sessions.

### **Everyday support**

Libraries support people in many ways every day. It is this area of our work which is difficult to measure as we don’t always know the outcomes of our interaction and often people speak to us because they know they can trust us with their information. Here is just one example of the difference we make.

*“We have a lady who comes in everyday. After introducing myself to her, I speak to her everyday I am in, to see if she is ok and how she is getting on, and if there is anything we can help her with. We now know each other very well, she has told me a lot about herself such as the mental health issues she has had recently to which I have found her some information (printed so she can take it away) and BOP books, she really appreciated the help and it has now motivated her to get help. She was also having trouble at her Church with another parishioner harassing her, I looked into the Churches safeguarding policy as she is a vulnerable adult and found the contact details for the safeguarding officer and offered to contact them if she did not want to. Everytime I speak to her she always says 'thank you for listening' I enjoy talking to her and seeing if we can do anything to help such as a referral to CYC housing or finding information on where she can get some clean clothes. At the start of the Year we both made New Years Resolutions together, I think being able to support the homeless by just being a friendly face and a bit of conversation is so important.”*

## **Information and Advice Team**

We have been invited to sit on the Information and Advice Task and Finish Group that has been set up by the Health and Wellbeing Board. We have much to contribute in this area and we welcome the opportunity to support the new strategy.

## **Places of Learning, Creativity & Discovery**

### **Digital Inclusion**

We are working with the council's revenue and benefits team to train Explore staff to answer first level benefits enquiries and to support individual's applications to Universal Credit. This is part of a wider area of work where our staff can support a range of Council departments by freeing them up to deal with more complex enquiries. It makes sense as libraries are local and people trust us to provide accurate information. This type of work is called assisted digital. The majority of the population is digitally literate and increasingly all aspects of life are conducted online, but this is leaving behind people who can't or won't become digitally literate. Our work focuses on showing people the benefits to being online and supported people who have difficulty through disabilities with it. Our staff are increasingly supporting people so they are not left behind. This may mean that we work with them to access services as well as training them to do it themselves.

## **Media Arts**

The media arts programme funded by the Arts Council is moving forward with Maker Mondays. Digital making is about getting people back to making things, taking things apart, seeing how they work and use this knowledge to create new and more interesting things. We have a 3D printer and raspberry pi and robots. People can learn how to code and can experiment with support available if needed. This emphasises the role of libraries in bringing people together to learn, share ideas and create. We have partnered with DC Labs@York University (digital creativity lab) to deliver this part of the project.

Explore staff were involved in Layers upon Layers, a multi-art form storyhacking project in partnership with the International Centre for Arts and Narrative (ICAM), Catherine Heinemayer who is a storyteller, Emily Harvey, artist and Jane Fulton, musician. Staff were able to choose an art form in which to tell their story. This was a chance to learn something new and to rethink how to tell stories. A film is being produced to record the events. We want staff to be very involved with the project and they really enjoyed having the opportunity to discover hidden talents and share expertise.

## **The Archive**

It has been a very successful year in the Archive, progressing the backlog of cataloguing, making more collections accessible.

## **End of Year Performance**

The headlines are that we are continuing to increase both our onsite research visits and the number of archival encounters year on year. We had 544 reading room researchers last year, plus 2660 onsite encounters and 1131 offsite encounters. We hosted 90 onsite events, from community archive workshops to class visits.

We catalogued 7080 new items into the archives catalogue last year, including 3748 files from the Council's archive. Major collections catalogued (or partly catalogued) this year so far include:

- City of York Education Committee and Sub-Committees, 1880s-1974
- City of York Civil Defence, 1897-1986
- York Poor Law Union and Workhouse, 1837-1950s
- Ouse and Foss Navigation (company and City of York Council records), 1727-1968

Upcoming priorities in 2017 include the archives of the Medical Officer of Health, the Department of Health and the Department of Environmental Health and post-1974 Council minutes. We are also beginning to work on our significant collections of ephemera and 'orphaned' photographs, which will be catalogued in a weeklong volunteer 'Blitz-It' project in the summer as part of the Festival of Ideas.

### **Children and Young People**

In 2016/17 we hosted archive and local history events with over 1200 children and young people and their families across the city. Half of these events took place in our Gateway libraries or other community venues, bringing the archives to families in local areas. Our highly successful Map Attack event at York Explore during the York Resident's Festival attracted 400 people over two days. Families were challenged to reconstruct historic buildings in York using Lego prompted by using maps and photographs of the city.

### **Work Placements and Work Experience**

We supported over 20 York St. John University and University of York students with work placements and experience in 2016-17. These students supported our cataloguing work as well as working on research projects to develop education packs and story boxes for children.

We also provided weekly work placements for two residents from Askham Grange prison, helping them to develop skills and experience prior to their release.

### **Find My Past – York archives go live**

The York Electoral Registers, Trade Directories, Freeman's Registers and other records will go live on the Find My Past website on 12<sup>th</sup> May. These records have been digitised and indexed as part of a project to make them fully name searchable for the first time. Free access will be available in all Explore libraries, either via the public computers or wifi.

### **Supporting City of York Council, the Coroner and the Courts**

We have been working with CYC officers to catalogue and transfer 2260 boxes of records from the Guildhall to the archives for permanent preservation. These critical business records will then be managed by

Explore as part of the civic archive. Our civic archivist continues to work closely with Council officers to provide access to property, legal and democratic services records on a weekly basis. She has also provided specialist advice to the North Yorkshire Police, the York Coroner and the Magistrates Court on outstanding cases and queries, as well as the transfer of records under the new 20 year rule of the Public Records Act.

### **York-Munster Twinning Anniversary**

Our civic archivist is working in partnership with the Council on the celebration of the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the York-Munster twinning. York Explore will host a reception for a civic party from Munster in June, inviting representatives from organisations across the city who have benefited from the relationship since 1957. In September we will host an exhibition co-produced with the York Munster Association and the Council sharing memories and stories from the last 60 years.

### **Exhibition at Fairfax House**

*Made in York: Inventing and Enlightening the Georgian City*, which opens on 5<sup>th</sup> May, will contain a number of treasures on loan from the archive collections including the 18<sup>th</sup> century Astronomical Notebook of John Goodricke and the letters of William Etty.

### **Past Caring Project**

Annex 4 contains the latest update from this project funded by the Wellcome Trust and Annex 5 gives an example from the records.