

Community-managed libraries as community hubs

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Introduction

The Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 gives local authorities a statutory duty “...to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof”. As public sector budgets have been repeatedly cut, many local authorities have been unable to maintain their existing network of libraries and explored other ways of providing the service, using community-managed models.

These arrangements are very varied but are characterised by the use of volunteers to operate (and usually manage) the library service. In some cases, the library remains part of the local authority’s statutory service and is owned, supported financially and managed by the library authority – with local community volunteers operating the service. In others, the library is financially independent from the library authority, managed by the community (formally constituted as a charity, CIC, CIO etc) and may lease the building or own or manage it as the result of a community asset transfer. Some are supported by their parish council. There are many arrangements falling somewhere in between which is evidenced in some of the case studies contained in this report.

The Community Managed Libraries Peer Network (CMLPN) helps community managed libraries (CMLs) to run effectively and successfully by sharing ideas, learning, experiences and inspiration. This research, commissioned by CMLPN and funded by Power to Change Trust, sought to investigate how CMLs can turn themselves into community hubs.

Ten semi-structured qualitative interviews were carried out with representatives from CMLs and library service managers from local authorities, representing c.39 libraries in total, with individual perspectives on seven. These were self-selected from an email call-out for participation and the interviews were carried out via Zoom video conference. The CMLs varied in age, with the earliest set up in 2012 and the latest yet to re-open as CMLs in 2020. They included CMLs from Newcastle, Sheffield, Derby, Leicester, Warwickshire, Northamptonshire, Hertfordshire and London.

Nine case studies available with this research, were also captured from CMLs in London, Newcastle, Warwickshire, Leicestershire, Coventry, South Tyneside, Sheffield and Manchester, all at varying stages of development as community hubs.

What do we mean by ‘community hub’?

Although there is no formal definition of a community hub, most literature on the subject define them according to their multi-purpose nature and their provision of services for the local community. For example, in their 2017 report on libraries as community hubs, Renaisi describe a community hub as *‘a focal point for local activities, services, and facilities, accessible to the local community. They are multi-purpose and reflect local needs in terms of what they provide’* (Thomson & Murray-Sanderson 2017). Referencing Locality, Richards et al define them as *‘a multi-purpose centre or building that is made accessible to the residents of the area that it occupies. It provides a range of community services, delivered by community members, and is often managed by a dedicated community organisation’* (Richards et al. 2018).

Definitions also include less tangible aspects of their role, for example, in combatting social isolation or representing a safe space. Renaisi say that *‘Community hubs have an important social function bringing people together from a cross section of the community, addressing isolation, and being a safe space where anyone is welcome’* (Thomson & Murray-Sanderson 2017). Locality also stress the importance of local community involvement, stating that community hubs *‘provide services for the community, but also by the community. Local people are involved both in making decisions about how services are run, how buildings are managed, and also supporting delivery through volunteering’* (Locality 2017).

Many local authority-run libraries have become community hubs through co-location with other services. These community hubs tend to be characterised by large buildings (either large library buildings in which other services are also offered, or large buildings offering a range of services, of which one is the library) and by a focus on alignment of a range of public services. Community-managed libraries may be in similar physical co-location arrangements but are mostly smaller, yet still able to offer space for groups and clubs, may have cafes or second hand bookstores, and may have relationships with local services to provide drop in ‘surgeries’ (e.g. the police, local MPs, or planning authorities).

Attitudes to becoming a community hub

In general, CMLs are positive about playing a role as a community hub and see this as a natural fit with their community ethos. Interviewees felt that this was about understanding and reflecting their communities and providing services and activities that they wanted and in many cases, lead themselves.

“It’s a meeting place and addresses the needs of individuals who live in the community and it’s responsive to what they need...so it’s a place for information, for recreation and for learning... It has developed from just somewhere you went to borrow books or use computers...it’s a focus for the community.”

“It means providing services to residents that is of the residents own making...Not just us renting out space to become financially stable, that is not the idea at all. The whole thing is generated by and for the community. Sustainability comes from being totally inclusive.”

“To me a hub is kind of like the heart of the community, where there might be different things running and not just one service, and not just one group of people using that building... [Volunteers] often have very close personal links with the church, or the parish council or with other volunteer projects in the villages...so they just seem to be even better at getting other people into those buildings and to use them. So for me that’s what a hub is. It’s that kind of focal point...it’s not just rooms and chairs.”

Providing community services within libraries is not totally without controversy. The former head of Waterstones bookshops Tim Coates in particular has been vocal about what he sees as a weakening of libraries by ‘trying to do too much’ beyond promoting reading. In a statement in response, Libraries Connected reference a 2013 US book *Transforming Libraries, Building Communities: The Community-Centered Library*, in which the authors argue for an acknowledgment that ‘information is in abundance in contemporary life. And while accessing information will always be at the heart of what libraries do, it isn’t the only thing they do. It may not be, in the future, even the most important thing that they do’ (Libraries Connected 2019).

In addition, many interviewees felt that these services (including the core library service) should be provided by the local authority, particularly

from community-managed library groups which had evolved out of community action to save their library from closure. However, many took a pragmatic view that through the community taking over the management, they could ensure that assets and services would not be lost entirely – whilst also regaining some control over what they offered and how they were run.

Few interviewees tended to articulate their community-managed library as a community business. Power to Change defines community business loosely as a business that is locally-rooted, trades for the benefit of the community, is accountable to the local community and has a broad community impact. In some cases, interviewees suggested that in order to remain financially sustainable, community-managed libraries had to be run as businesses, whilst also ensuring they remained welcoming spaces and offered a library service to all. The following quotations from the interviews demonstrate some of the different views on this:

“Libraries and businesses are two very different things – basic library functions cannot be charged for. It’s different for something like a community pub, the pub’s always been a business.”

“Some ideas are seen as too commercial but from my mind, a community hub has to be run as a community enterprise which has a strong commercial aspect to it I think.”

CMLs had a range of different business models, including some that received grants from their library authority (often tapering off over a period of years) and others that were financially independent and had to bring in other sources of income through, for example, charging or asking for donations for events, having a café, or setting up regular ‘supporter’ donation schemes. Some had been successful in applying for grants, allowing them to make improvements or repairs to their building, or project funding to run specific projects in the community.

How are community-managed libraries operating as community hubs?

CMLs are offering a range of community activities and services beyond core library lending including:

Activities

- Reading & writing: reading groups; Summer Reading Challenge; creative writing groups; author events
- Children: baby 'rhyme time'; homework clubs; groups for children with disabilities
- Languages: language conversation groups; ESOL courses
- Arts: exhibitions; music concerts; theatre performance; film screenings; photography groups
- Health and wellbeing: gardening; dementia groups; yoga; mindfulness sessions; weight-loss groups
- Lifelong learning: lectures; local history society meetings; crafts sessions; U3A groups
- Social: 'knit and natter' groups; Women's Institute groups, quiz nights; games nights
- Campaigning and politics: political party groups; environmental groups
- Other: food markets; organising walks
- Open Gardens events in local area
- Families: breakfast and after-school clubs for children; NHS Health visitor baby clinics and breastfeeding clinics
- Health and wellbeing: NHS health visitor sessions; cognitive behavioural therapy
- Co-location: some CMLs are co-located with other services including legal advice, leisure centres, community centres, parish council offices or fire stations and there are attempts to create synergies between these
- Other: electric car charging

Services

- News and local issues: police or council drop-in 'surgeries'; newspaper subscriptions; public meetings
- IT: access to computers; free wifi; IT and digital support
- Careers and welfare: work-finding skills; advice on benefits, housing and blue badge applications; Citizens Advice Bureau

Retail and hospitality

- Retail: second-hand book stores; selling artworks by local artists and books by local authors
- Hospitality: Cafes; hot drinks machine; bars

Other activities/roles that CMLs would like to play include: providing support for micro-businesses, offering counselling or other mental health services, offering one-to-one tuition for children and young people and offering more health services within the library.

CMLs are keen that they do not duplicate or compete with other local services and local businesses and take this into consideration in terms of what they offer. For example, CMLs in areas without a community centre were more enthusiastic about playing a role as a 'community hub', than those who felt this was the community centre's role. However, whilst some community-managed libraries were keen not to confuse their role with the community centre's role, others felt there was a good opportunity for alignment and even sharing of space for community group bookings.

Similarly, those that sold items to generate income (such as art by local artists, or those that had a cafe) were keen not to compete with local businesses. CMLs which were close together were also keen to coordinate their activities so as not to duplicate effort and reduce numbers of attendees.

"So that's another thing about not treading on their

toes [a play service for children with disabilities]. They work during term times so maybe during the holidays we might be able to offer some open play sessions in the library... So we're just steering around the offer that's already there... there are some things that all libraries will be expected to offer... But then beyond that there's all kinds of stuff that would be great to share as an offer to residents."

What are the barriers to operating as a community hub?

Some of the main perceived barriers to becoming a 'community hub' are:

Space

Some CMLs are in small or less flexible spaces, which reduces their ability to offer space for groups and clubs or to run activities other than core library services. This means that some feel conflicted about library opening times, because they want to open the library for longer but also feel that if the library was open for a shorter time, the space could be used by more groups. While larger CMLs are able to talk about aligning their activities with their core library services, those in the smaller or less flexible buildings sometimes articulate this in terms of opposition between the ambition they have to expand as a community hub and the core library service that they are set up to provide.

In addition, some 'community hub' activities are noisy and so whilst there may be enough space to provide different activities and services, there are competing and sometimes conflicting demands e.g. for quiet study space vs baby 'rhyme time'.

"There's a children's bit and people are very used to mums and toddlers coming in and doing nursery rhymes. You just put a notice up and say if you don't want to be around them, don't come at this point... likewise, for the older residents thinking about the times when they would come and when they wouldn't want to come, so you can give them some space that isn't a noisy time. And we've reconfigured the library so you can move all the shelves. There was some fixed ones right in the middle, so now we can open the whole thing out and make the most of that space... And there's a small office you could rent out for one to ones or small groups but that's about it. Other libraries seem to have great big

rooms upstairs that they can do theatre events and all kinds in but we're not that sort of scale."

"One of the things is that we don't have space to host meetings when the library is open to the public as a library. So for example, the U3A and Yoga groups have to operate on the days when the library is shut or in the evenings... we would like to build a community room... We would like to offer some office space to people who are... not working within a conventional work space and we think that's obviously... going to be an increasing model even after the virus... We haven't got an accessible toilet, we'd like one of those. We'd like a bigger kitchen to go with all of these things."

Heavy reliance on volunteers

Many CMLs identified their reliance on volunteers as a risk to the sustainability of the activities and services they offer. However, the perception of the risk often seemed greater than their actual experience thus far, with CMLs generally being very positive (and sometimes surprised) about the level of engagement from volunteers and finding that their volunteer base naturally replenished itself. Although CMLs have a large volunteer base, there tended to be a smaller number of volunteers who were particularly committed and did a lot of the day-to-day management. The impact of Covid-19 in this area was also a particular concern, with some interviewees worried about maintaining volunteer engagement during lockdown and given many volunteers are more vulnerable due to their age.

"We have got a good volunteer force but driving things comes down to a very small number of key people. That's certainly a worry... If one of those got run over by the proverbial bus, it would really impact us. People come up with ideas and we say "that's a really good idea. Are you willing to drive?" And sometimes the answer is "no, I don't want to get involved in that way". So ideas don't happen."

"Something that you might think would be a barrier but isn't is volunteer recruitment – pretty much constant, we do get new volunteers coming forward but it's something we're conscious of because so heavily reliant on continuing supply of volunteers."

"We've been very lucky I think the Parish council was amazed by how many people came to volunteer but the problem at the moment is keeping volunteers interested, we have to try and contact them every so often and find

different ways of saying 'I don't know when we'll be able to reopen or what it's going to be like'"

Relationship with the library authority

In some cases where the library authority have stepped away entirely it is felt that CMLs may have fewer opportunities. In 2011, the Museums and Libraries Authority called for a 'symbiotic relationship' between community-managed libraries and the local authority, saying that 'too much distance from local authority support would likely reduce a community library's capacity to be used to achieve social change within an area – missing out on a greater strategic opportunity for the local authority' (Woolley 2011). In terms of reading, some community-managed libraries who are independent of the library authority's library management system will not have their issues recorded in library statistics for the area, potentially affecting the data that is collected about reading prevalence.

On the other hand, some of those that are still closely connected to their library authority occasionally feel restricted in what they can do due to safeguarding, health and safety concerns or budgetary restrictions. The community-managed library's priorities can be less of a priority for the local authority and so they feel restricted from making improvements to the building, in a way that more independent community-managed libraries could do (if they could raise the funding through fundraising or grants). Responsibility for payment (e.g. for building improvements or equipment) and maintenance of these in the long term can be more challenging where the library authority is more closely involved.

"Initially we felt quite constrained because every time we wanted to change the opening hours we had to get approval from the library service, even though they were only open 13 hours and we were open 30 hours we still had to do like a risk assessment and canvas the users."

"[Community managed library] wanted to do one to one tuition with some of the students and a couple of the volunteers are retired teachers. So we felt that doing one to one tuition wasn't really part of the library's remit, there are safeguarding risks that we had to talk through with them."

"So it became a bit of a conversation around there might be a benefit now, but there also a cost now. We

don't have that budget. We can't ask you to pay for that work. So it kind of reached stalemate. Though again a really good idea, but quite difficult to agree on whose responsibility it is and whether or not it's a priority."

The impact of Covid-19

The fieldwork took place between 8th June and 7th July, covering a period of lockdown where no libraries were able to open (one had started to reopen from 6th July). During lockdown, some CMLs continued to offer aspects of their service, including:

- Virtual book clubs/other clubs and groups – coffee mornings
- Virtual 'rhyme time' with families
- Online lectures
- Home delivery/click and collect book lending services
- Social media engagement e.g. 'shelfies'
- Directing to e-resources

"It took... a week or two to get our head round this new situation but as soon as that dawned on us that we were in a completely new situation... I think because we are an independent voluntary group we don't have to get approval of lots of other people we started to think about what we could do online or by other means quite quickly, one of the first things we did was establish an online newsletter... an online book group, Spanish conversation group moved, we started online Thursday evening lectures so we sort of moved as quickly as we could to establish things online for what we used to do in the building. But most significant we established a book collection and delivery service."

CMLs have been hit hard financially during this time, with many unable to bring in alternative streams of income from events, cafés and room hire; activities which are also likely to be the most delayed in restarting. Some have had success in applying for small business support grants or other Covid-support to help make up for lost income, but some were concerned about further cut-backs from local

council/parish council after Covid. For some, this period has highlighted the importance of succession and business planning.

“When we are able to open which is likely to be September at the earliest. I think it will just be for minimal library activity, we won’t be doing social gatherings there straight away. That will have to build as it goes. Which financially puts [us] in a slightly difficult situation, because we were hoping as the year progressed to be able to make money from activities, small room hire. Which would help us add to the grant that we get ... Which means this first year now, we’ll have to work harder to get the reserves that we need to carry on.”

Coming out of lockdown, some CMLs are planning to start by offering ‘click and collect’ or home delivery, with books being quarantined between loans, before opening fully. By far the biggest concern amongst CMLs is the willingness of volunteers to return when they do reopen, especially as many volunteers are in clinically vulnerable categories. Many have been communicating with their volunteers over the lockdown to maintain engagement and report that volunteers are keen to come back and reprise their roles. However, some CMLs anticipate shorter opening hours initially due to volunteer shortages. One interviewee responsible for a number of CMLs was concerned that some may not reopen at all.

Linked to the physical measures required, CMLs are concerned that they will struggle to play a role as a ‘community hub’ because they are unable to have socially-distanced gatherings.

“I think it’s going to be very gradual and one of the problems of Boris announcing that Libraries can open from the 4th July is that there’s a wide expectation that they will. In many cases that’s not going to happen... The experience is going to be different, you’re going to go in, stay socially distanced, pick your books and go away. And that’s not what people want from a library.”

“We’re going back to what it was before which is just somewhere to borrow books, which is important as well but it wasn’t what we’d become, we had become a community hub.”

In addition, the Covid-19 lockdown had further accelerated uptake of digital services. With social distancing likely to remain in force for some time,

some CMLs were concerned that those who had made the move to e-resources would not come back to physical libraries. While some saw this as an existential threat, others felt that this lent weight to the importance of their activities and services beyond core library services.

“If the drive towards providing digital services continues then the justification for a purely local library, a local community library, begins to diminish because you can get everything you want online, so if it’s going to exist it has to exist in some subtly or significantly different form.”

As the world emerges from Covid-19 and economic recession seems inevitable, CMLs will need to turn their attention to what their communities need from them and whether that has changed. When asked about this, most CMLs were focused on survival and reopening. However, some CMLs had considered this and felt that there was likely to be greater demand around benefits applications and job-seeking. One CML was putting in place an accredited employability training programme for volunteers and for long term unemployed residents about managing a public space. Others had better understood the levels of need and social isolation in their communities during Covid-19 and were planning on keeping their home delivery and ‘click and collect’ as a way of reaching people not reached in other ways, as well as partnering with local GP surgeries to develop their role in signposting to other information, resources and services. One interviewee managing several CMLs was thinking about the role libraries could play in helping with mental health and bereavement, as well as the potential of the buildings when the library itself was shut, if health and support needs in the community may be higher.

“Given the library has a role of bringing people together, that role may be even more important to bring people together after all this self isolation stuff that’s been going on.”

“I think locally here people have access to practical advice and support, it’s the emotional support that is needed. I think what we were, it gives people a sense of community. I mean we are a safe place...so it’s how you make that happen again.”

“One of the positives of lockdown is that we are all appreciating our localities more and the people who are close to us, our neighbours. Our gardens, all of the local resources. We’re kind of all hunkering down but

we're realising what is immediately around us, in a way that we don't normally... that actually might have a positive impact, there might be other volunteers to come out of the woodwork to help us... because they have a different feeling about their community and they want to help."

Discussion and conclusions

In 2011, the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) did a review of some of the first community-managed libraries. They concluded that 'existing community libraries have achieved something over and above keeping the library open within their areas, offering new activities and social events, engaging their local communities and often exemplifying a beneficial effect on community cohesion' (Woolley 2011). In some cases, they noted that CMLs were also able to improve the service by increasing numbers of users and lengthening opening hours.

More recently, in 2017, SERIO were commissioned by DCMS and the Libraries Taskforce to undertake research on the effectiveness and sustainability of community managed libraries in England. From their interviews with stakeholders they concluded that CMLs 'exceeded expectations for specific outputs including financial savings; increased opening hours, visitor counts and book issues, maintaining quality levels and increasing social capital in the local area. There were also areas where stakeholders reported that they felt that CLs were better placed than they were to deliver services that engaged and tailored services to local communities' (SERIO 2017). In the current day, this remains the case. Prior to being run by the community, many libraries had seen a decline in opening hours due to cuts in local government funding. Many CMLs interviewed had been able to increase the hours that the library was open, due to their strong volunteer base and the attractiveness of their offer to their local communities. Those who were keyholders to the building were also able to use the space flexibly, allowing other activities and events to take place outside of normal library opening hours. CMLs were running a wide range of activities and services, partnering with other services and community groups.

In the aftermath of Covid-19, where economic recession is likely, now is the time to explore the opportunities available to existing and future CMLs to expand their Library resource into a community

hub. CMLs can provide activities and services for the benefit of their local communities, creating connections to counter the effects of the Covid-19 lockdown, using their spaces flexibly to cater for different needs, and supporting local economies as home-working continues. They play an important role in supporting local social infrastructure, supporting public services and offering meaningful volunteering opportunities, allowing volunteers' skills to be used effectively for their benefit of their communities.

For some CMLs in smaller and less flexible buildings, the constraints of their physical space have started to place the activities and services they offer into conflict. This poses an interesting question about whether being a 'community hub' is about the building, or the intangible aspects (reputation, community involvement etc). Perhaps what makes a 'community hub' is something in the link between these two aspects, as an assemblage of the physical building assets combined with the skills, energy and determination of those communities running them, and the reputation and position of trust developed as a result. As one interviewee remarked, "*it's not just rooms and chairs*".

CMLs have many of the features and characteristics needed to develop as community hubs. The following 'opportunities' set these out, as well as suggesting some of the elements which may require more development.

Opportunities for CMLs to become community hubs

● By and for the community

Because CMLs are often developed by existing community groups, or groups formed to save their library service, they are strongly linked to their communities. They predominantly rely on volunteers from their communities to develop and lead activities and services that they offer. This allows them to harness the skills and resources available within their communities and to directly address the needs of the community. Ensuring they reflect the diversity of the community, or their wider area (e.g. in terms of ethnicity, age and socio-economic classification), will be an important on-going project for many – especially in terms of increasing diversity of volunteers.

“The key thing is to initially build up as much support as you possibly can from local residents. One of the reasons we’ve been successful is because we had 2 quite strong groups... and a combination of these two meant we were covering the voice of a lot of local people. You need to network with whatever other community groups you can so you can reach as many residents as possible. You just do not know what skills lie within your community. There are people who come out of the woodwork with tremendous skills... It’s critical to do that at the beginning to get a strong base before you start.”

● Partnership working

CMLs are good at working with partners in their communities. CMLs developing as a community hub are keen that they play a supportive and non-competitive role in their communities, aligning and not duplicating their offers. Steps have been made towards greater collaboration and learning between CMLs and many interviewees said that they had benefitted enormously from the advice and experience of others when setting up.

The very different contexts and operating models of CMLs between (and even sometimes within) different areas can sometimes make it feel that CMLs are less comparable. Some of the strengths of CMLs – their independent, enterprising and community-led nature – can be a drawback if people feel that they know what their communities need and don’t need any help from anyone else, but it is essential that CMLs are open to continuing to learn from each other.

“You really need to talk to other people doing the same thing even if what they’re doing doesn’t fit with what you’re doing, it will make you think about what you’re doing, and you’ll invariably find something that you can borrow or steal from what somebody else is doing.”

● Position of trust

Libraries are spaces where anyone is welcome. They act as trusted providers of information, education and leisure. This gives them a strong opportunity to act as a community hub, through which they are able to catalyse community action, signpost to or collect services in one place, and foster connections between people. This can help to reach people who

are more difficult to reach through other services.

“There’s always going to be people who want to borrow a book but we need to do much more than that, in my view... I think we need to do much more in the way of outreach for people who are isolated or locked down even when there isn’t a pandemic going on.”

● Flexibility

The Covid-19 pandemic has shown how flexible and resourceful CMLs can be. Imaginative uses of library space and resources have been made in order to continue to provide the role they have come to occupy in their communities. Some are now considering how best they can support their communities as they start to take tentative steps towards reopening, in a world which may look and feel quite different. With a solid foundation of community support and a diverse set of income sources, this flexibility and agility may put CMLs in a more resilient position to face any future shocks.

“I don’t think we suffer from being a fixed viewpoint so if things change or new demands emerge we’ll probably try to do what we can to accommodate them and it’s a very flexible building so I’m sure it will be used in different ways in the future.”

● Tenacity

Many CMLs have arisen out of communities coming together to save their library service, and this spirit of community action permeates CMLs in their determination to make the libraries a success. Many interviewees highlighted that the library authority had been surprised by the level of volunteer support they have been able to attract, and their determination and hard work, which has resulted in high quality library services and expansion of community provision, to other activities and services, the success of which have sometimes surprised their critics.

“It’s kind of interesting sometimes when they are very unintentionally and discreetly proving some of our previous decisions wrong, that actually, there is a demand in a small village to do certain things. Not just about actually being in the bigger town and that’s quite interesting. They do it differently.”

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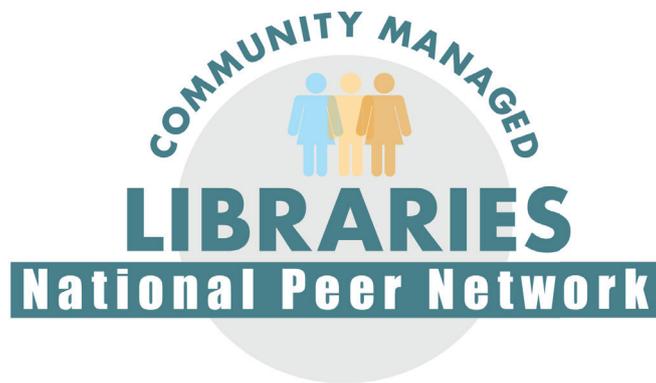
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CASE STUDIES

Community Managed Libraries (CMLs) as community hubs case studies were developed in close collaboration with nine CMLs from London, Newcastle, Warwickshire, Leicestershire, Coventry, South Tyneside, Sheffield and Manchester. Some also took part in semi-structured qualitative interviews as part of the research commissioned by the Community Managed Libraries National Peer Network (CMLPN) funded by Power to Change Trust to investigate how CMLs can turn themselves into community hubs.

A template and guidance were provided for the nine CMLs to prepare their case studies. These were then reviewed, developed and proofread by peers from other CMLs.

CMLs are anchored in their communities with the library service at the heart of everything they do, as evidenced in the nine case studies. The case studies in this document show CMLs which have already developed successfully into community hubs offering a range of local services in addition to the library provision. Others have put building blocks in place or working towards becoming community hubs, all often in response to identified gaps or growing socio-economic

needs in the community such as unemployment, isolation and loneliness, poverty and more. The services in the community hubs are often delivered in partnerships, some of which are located in their spaces; by local residents, voluntary and public sector groups, volunteers or paid staff who run the space or with support from their local authorities or parish councils.

Learning from the research and the case studies will inform a toolkit which will support CMLs looking to become Community Hubs. It will be developed in close collaboration with the case study areas and those interviewed for the research into CMLs as community hubs.

The activities and services set out in the case studies must not be seen as 'best practice', there are numerous other innovative examples from CMLs and libraries nationally. The Community Managed Libraries National Peer Network aims to collate and share some of these case studies/ learning from other CMLs over time. All the case studies will be available to read or download from the Network's online forum.

For further information about the CMLNPN visit: <https://communitylibrariesnetwork.org/>

To join the Network, email: info@communitylibrariesnetwork.org

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Archibald Corbett Community Library

Lewisham, London



Photo by Peter Marshall

Introduction

In 2016, two local groups, The Archibald Corbett Society and the Corbett Residents Association from the Corbett Estate in Catford, South East London formed a charity trading as a not for profit community business to take over the management of the Torridon Road Library from the London Borough of Lewisham to save it from being closed down due to the Council being forced to make further cuts to its Libraries budget as a result of reductions in Central Government grants.

The Library was renamed The Archibald Corbett Community Library, Arts and Heritage Centre in recognition of Archibald Cameron Corbett who donated the land for this Carnegie Library built in 1907 as part of his development of a housing estate of over 3,000 houses between 1896 and 1913 designed to promote healthy living, encourage independence through home ownership and the creation of an environment to encourage a thriving community. Today, 35% of the population of Catford South ward where the Corbett Estate is situated are Black Caribbean residents.

Context

Management agreements

The Trustees negotiated a rolling management agreement with the Council for the maintenance and upkeep of the building as opposed to a 25 year fully repairing lease which was on offer, as it was recognised that such a responsibility could become too onerous for a volunteer group especially as the ownership of the building would remain with the Council and the length of the lease would not encourage lenders to make substantial loans for future development as would be the case with a 120 years lease or a freehold asset transfer.

It was agreed the Charity would be responsible for all internal repairs and maintenance of the building plus running costs and the Council would be responsible for all external repairs and maintenance.

An agreement was also negotiated for the Council to continue the provision of Library services to include operating systems, self-service machines and provision and maintenance of a stock of over 7,000 books including new titles. The Council also provided training support for all volunteers and a link library for day to day enquiries.

No Council funding was available.

Assuring our Sustainability

A schedule of overhead costs was drawn up based on previous usage through the Council together with an income forecast. A start-up grant of £2,450 was provided by the Archibald Corbett Society to ensure initial cash flow stability. In addition to donations from activities, first year income was derived from sales of donated second hand books, photocopying and printing services, the hire of a meeting room, playroom and office space, a Barista self-service coffee and tea bar, donations from events and from individual donors which are eligible for the Gift Aid scheme providing an additional 25% income on those donations.

First year trading results showed an income of £18,867 with expenditure of £18,547 giving an operating surplus of £320. This increased in year two to an income of £43,996 against £35,270 expenditure and a surplus of £8,726 and in year three to £64,083 income, £55,116 expenditure and a surplus of £8,967. These figures are trading income only and do not include any grant income.

Archibald Corbett as a Community Hub

Following on in Corbett's footsteps it was decided to pursue his vision of healthy living and a thriving community and develop the Library into a Community Hub delivering activities and services to support residents' social welfare and health and well-being in addition to continuing to provide and expand the existing library service.

This was made achievable by the response from local residents to the initial call for volunteers to run the library service which included a number who were interested in using their skills to provide activities free of charge for the benefit of local residents. There was also plenty of capacity in the building to run activities without detracting from the provision of library and digital services.

A wide range of free activities and services, tailored to the interests of the local community soon became available ensuring the hub was inclusive, accessible and open to over 20,000 residents from Catford South, Lewisham Central and Whitefoot wards including the Corbett Estate.

These include

- Baby Bounce, Story Time and Stories and Rhymes, a French speaking musical playgroup, a music making group, Stay and Play and a colouring club, all for parents and under 5s
- A homework club and arts and crafts activities for primary and secondary school children
- Space for performance arts, Hatha Yoga and Tai Chi sessions for all ages
- Acting as a centre for local groups to hold meetings and activities, including Slimming World and the Women's Institute and as a venue for community police information sessions and local Councillors' meetings
- Writers, reading, reminiscence, meditation and board games groups plus knit 'n' natter and BAME Emotional Support Group for adults.
- Gentle seated Yoga and dementia friendly activities for older people
- ESOL classes, digital inclusion support through the Learn My Way programme and a Digital



Learning Zone to help residents fill in council and government forms online plus general drop in advice session

- Working with outside organisations to provide health visitor check-ups for babies, breakfast and after school clubs and community events such as concerts, film screenings and food markets
- Working in partnership with Lewisham Libraries Division to deliver national reading promotions to include the Summer Reading Challenge and with two local Primary Schools delivering reading sessions to year groups including those with learning difficulties
- All activities and advice services are run by volunteers and are free to ensure inclusivity for those unable to afford making payments to attend. In return donations are suggested from those able to donate.

Volunteer Support and Achievements

For the first three years the Community Hub and Library was run solely by volunteers led by an operations team of three with experience of small business management, buildings management and volunteer networking.

The initial key to ensuring sustainability was the operations team driving the project forward and creating a structure for future succession.

In its first year of operation as a Community Managed Library opening hours were extended and visitors increased year on year by 24% totalling 59,000 with over 9,000 attendees at activities and 500 new library cards being issued. Over 55 volunteers contributed around 880 hours per month to both the running of the library service and the provision of activities.

Attendance figures have continued to rise year on year along with book issues and the development of activities for the under 5s has benefitted the library with a crossover of young families signing up for library membership

Library volunteers are provided with comprehensive training on all aspects of library systems and management led by an ex-librarian volunteer and regular social gatherings are held to allow volunteers from different days to meet up and share experiences.

Future Development

To support the development of the community business a grant of £15,000 was awarded by the Bright Ideas fund to provide business development support to include the production of a five-year business plan.

As a result of producing a plan, this in turn gave the opportunity for an application to be made to the Big Lottery Reaching Communities fund for a grant of £210,000 to employ two project development managers on a job share basis for three years to maintain the running of the centre and develop its income sources to ensure future long term financial sustainability to include the continued employment of managers in the future once the grant has ended.

The bid was successful resulting in two managers being employed from June 2019. The funding also allowed for the managers to develop a 3 year programme to deliver free accredited training for up to 20 volunteers and local long term unemployed people per year in the 'Management of public spaces within a community environment' to enable them to move into full time employment.

This series of courses which are due to start at the end of September 2020 have become extremely apposite in the light of the current Covid-19 pandemic allowing volunteers and unemployed people to retrain and learn new skills that may well be appropriate in the future jobs market post Covid-19.

A further grant of £10,000 was secured from the Lottery Heritage Fund to make an hour-long documentary about Archibald Corbett, 'The man and his houses' which has increased residents' interest in their local area and cemented their commitment to supporting the Centre.

A link to the film can be found here <https://thecorbetsociety.org.uk/film/>

The Charity has also secured two grants from local social housing provider London & Quadrant to develop its digital learning zone through the purchase of six laptop computers and create a performing arts centre within the existing Library by purchasing new mobile shelving that can be moved to create a performance and exercise space.

Covid-19

During lock down the Centre opened a 'You Tube' channel with virtual activities and reading sessions

and provided a click and collect service and doorstep visits by volunteers to people who were shielding. The Centre has gradually re-opened both for Library and Digital services and a number of activities with social distancing plus the re-opening of breakfast and after school clubs to accommodate the return to school.

The Charity was able to access a £25,000 grant from the local council business rates division as part of the Government's Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grants fund which has covered lost income through the lock down period. Volunteers were kept in touch with regularly and are gradually returning, including the over 70s, now that lockdown restrictions have been eased.

Learning

The key element to the successful takeover of the existing Library from Lewisham Council and developing it into a community hub was the ability to create a structure and operating platform and network of volunteers within three months to meet the deadline set by the Council before the Library was due to be closed down.

For this to happen the Directors/Trustees of the new charitable business delegated the responsibility to a volunteer operations team of three board members which had the flexibility to make decisions without constantly reverting back to the Board for approval but at the same time providing regular progress reports.

This allowed for a rapid decision making process in negotiating agreements with the council, creating an operational plan with budgets and setting up systems and procedures, the recruitment and training of volunteers, purchasing equipment and agreeing contracts with suppliers and developing activities in line with the charitable objects agreed by the Trustees to develop a community hub.

Such a structure ensured that any challenges that arose, mainly with IT issues, were quickly overcome and enabled deadlines to be met. The continued presence of the operational team at all times the Library/Centre was open during the first year was critical to create continuity for volunteers and to answer questions and provide support at all times.

Conclusion

The development of this Library into a community hub demonstrates how strong, well organised

communities have the power to save social infrastructure in times of austerity and create community cohesion providing opportunities for local residents to become empowered as demonstrated by the following quotes from volunteers and users:

Volunteers



'I've been volunteering at the Corbett Community Library since the beginning. I run the Baby Bounce class on Fridays at 10am & 11am for children and babies. I absolutely love helping at the Library as well as giving something back to the community i live in; being a volunteer has given me lots of new skills, improved self-confidence, friends and pride in my fabulous community! We're very lucky to have such a dedicated team of volunteers at the library the vast amount of activities on offer is fantastic due to all of their hard work.

Working here the Archibald Corbett Community library, Arts and Heritage Centre has helped me with so many things. I've gained a lot of confidence working here as everybody is so friendly and welcoming. I've definitely improved on my IT skills, checking in and out books and helping people print their work out. I've also improved on my mathematical skills, working out the till taking in and out money. My first day here I was quite shy as I'm not really an outgoing person when it comes to communicating with people I've never met before but the staff here made me feel welcome and I know how to communicate with others more.'

The Library has a fantastic spirit. This lovely old building is brought alive by the people who pass through its doors. People in this community use this valuable resource, they truly care about their Library, about their local community and about each other. It is a heartening and humbling privilege to be part of such a fantastic service. It gives me a feeling of inclusion, of self value to come here and interact with people. I love that this hub of the community attracts all the different

types of people that make up the local area, people of so many cultures, ages, walks of life....'

Users

'I have been coming to this Library for 74 years, and have always enjoyed it. Joining the fight to keep it open this time and the last. Today it is brilliant with so many activities and a wonderful group of volunteers. I still borrow the books from here on a regular basis and make donations whenever I am able to. I hope to continue for many more years.'

'So many interesting things for adults and children to do, joining one of them I have made new friends and enjoyed the companionship. I have since joined another, and now volunteer to run a session of one hour after school for primarily children but have found adults joining in.'

'I think the Library is wonderful and well needed there are so many activities going on I'm in a few the Reminiscence (x2) and writer's group and before they moved the Inspired Word plus the Singalong with my grandchildren. I - am 62 years of age and instead of being like a vegetable at home growing old it's keeping me nice and young and my mind active. And meeting lots of new and wonderful people. I thank God every day. X'

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Earlsdon Carnegie Community Library (ECCL)

Coventry

Earlsdon Carnegie Community Library (ECCL)



was selected as an example of a Community Managed Library (CML) which is evolving into a community hub.

Introduction

Since becoming fully volunteer run and led in 2019, the library has diversified its services, offering a used bookshop, children's events including a craft club, lego club and "Read to Georgie" - a trained therapy dog who children can read to; monthly author events, room hire, art exhibits, and an extended number and variety of language clubs. ECCL have also maintained many of the original events and services that were provided by the library when it was council run, including Rhymetime, Knit and Natter, a friendship group (run by Age UK), tea and coffee facilities, a recycling hub etc. Many of the events and services that are held in or provided by the library are offered at a low cost or are free to attend/utilise.

Funding for a new part time Community Engagement Co-ordinator position (one-year fixed term contract) has been secured from Awards for All (part of The National Lottery) to increase the links between the library and the local community. The post holder was appointed in February 2020 and had a number of events planned before COVID-19 including author talks, a VE day celebration, genealogy workshops, educational children's workshops, art therapy courses, writing for purpose drop-in sessions (job applications, benefit applications etc.) and creative writing classes.

ECCL was also in close contact with local initiatives such as the Positive Images Festival and 2021 City of Culture, with plans to be involved in their programmes of events. All of these discussions are on hold due to the current global pandemic. The library has been shut since February and ECCL are unable to plan group events due to the ongoing uncertainty. It would be both financially and logistically unviable to hold socially distanced events inside the library since the council have stated that a maximum of 13 people are allowed in at any one time, including volunteers.

Context

Earlsdon Carnegie Community Library is situated in Earlsdon, Coventry, considered one of the more affluent areas of the city although it houses several areas of deprivation (English Indices of Deprivation score goes from 12.07 in some areas to 19.74). It also serves as the local library for a number of less well off areas including Spon End and Chapelfields (both thought to be "economically deprived areas" (<https://www.ilivehere.co.uk/statistics-spon-end-coventry-35600.html>))

Earlsdon is an electoral ward of Coventry South and has around 15,000 residents. Coventry overall was ranked the 81st most deprived local authority in the UK in 2019 (file:///home/chronos/u-b04db55d482d7af2127300aa62a737147fdc5a73/MyFiles/Downloads/loD2019_Summary_for_Coventry.pdf)

Earlsdon Carnegie Community Library is a well-loved community asset with a prominent location at the end of the local High Street. It was formally taken over from Coventry City Council in September 2017 by Earlsdon Library Friends (ELF) following the decision by the council to shut the building as part of a £4 million cost saving exercise. However, talks between ELF and the council broke down and the library was yet

again under threat of closure, until a new group of volunteers agreed to take on the challenge. (<https://www.coventrytelegraph.net/news/coventry-news/earlsdon-library-coventry-closing-14593614>).

ECCL was registered as a charity in September 2018 when it transitioned to becoming fully volunteer run and led. A recent council grant of £20,000 allowed for the reimagining of part of the building to become a flexible events/activity/meeting space with a new projector, sound system, comfy sofas and computer deskings. A small gallery has been created to showcase local artwork and new blinds have been fitted to allow for screenings of films and multi-media art installations. As of March 2020, there were over 70 volunteers working as both shift volunteers and within specific teams such as fundraising, social media etc.

Regular fundraising gave ECCL the funds to purchase new book stock. The council now only complete a small stock refresh several times a year. To date, over 300 books have been added to our stock, either purchased from a local independent book shop or via direct book donation.

About the library services

ECCL attracts over 7000 visitors per month and has hosted a number of well-attended events. It has support from a number of local businesses including being named as the charity of the year 2020 by the Earlsdon branch of Coventry Building Society. ECCL has over 1000 followers on social media and has two regular columns (What's On and Library Reflections) in the local newspaper. The website (www.earlsdonlibrary.org.uk) has had 45,000 visits by 11,000 visitors in the last year alone, with 825 people visiting it in the last month. The monthly newsletter is slowly gaining subscribers after the creation of an online sign up form in August 2020 - currently 58 people.

The latest figures (January 2020) show that during that month, ECCL lent books to 2030 adults, 251 senior citizens, 524 8-15 years old and 650 children (aged below 8). 25 borrowers were using the "Passport to Leisure" scheme (which gives free and discounted access to a range of services for people who claim "qualifying" benefits (https://www.coventry.gov.uk/info/96/leisure_and_culture/307/passport_to_leisure_and_learning_go_cv)).

ECCL developing into a community hub

Our lease agreement states that ECCL should be 50% core library services and 50% community focused - hence the £20k transition fund and the Community Engagement Coordinator position.

The main activities and services provided by ECCL are:

One main adult lending library, one children's library complete with child friendly seating, computers, toys etc.

The Reading Room



This is a multi-functional space with comfy seating, moveable bookcases, two banks of computers, free wifi, a projector, speakers, one self service machine for book borrowing, a small community art gallery, printing and photocopying facilities, tea and coffee making facilities, a small selection of snacks for sale, tables and chairs for working/reading.

Space can be booked in the library by businesses or individuals for events which take place after hours and local councillors hold their surgery sessions during normal library opening hours. Local primary schools bring their pupils to use the children's library when the building is shut to the public as they no longer have a library provision in the school itself. It is hoped that the new Reading Room will be used to host library events in the future, making use of the new facilities and open space.

Other activities in the library include:

- Book clubs
- Avid Readers pay £1 per person when they meet at the library.
- Children's events:
Includes Stay and Play, Rhymetime, Lego club,

Craft Club and “Read to Georgie”. These events are well attended and often include a diverse group of children. Attendance costs £1 per child except for stay and play which is free. ECCL pays the council to continue Rhymetime at the library - it is currently funded by The Earlsdon Festival who chose ECCL as their main beneficiary for 2019/2020 and so “sponsor” the event.

- Hobby groups
- Includes language groups, Knit and Natter and the Age UK friendship group: the groups are all well attended by a wide range of people who all pay £1 to attend. They meet when the library is already open - seating is reserved for them.
- The Bookshop
- ECCL has been inundated with book donations from the local community and there is a dedicated bookshop team who manage the scheme. Some books are added to our stock, others are sold for profit or recycled. The bookshop has been very profitable for the library - at ECCL’s opening event they raised £700 in one afternoon!
- Art exhibitions
- ECCL have previously reserved wall space (for free) for exhibitions from local art groups and The Rotary Club.
- Author events
- ECCL has hosted a number of author talks in a popular series called “Behind the Books”.
- They have often been well attended - sometimes by as many as 70 people - all paying £5 for a talk with free tea and cake.

Plans for the future included genealogy classes (in conjunction with the Rotarians), creative writing workshops (in conjunction with a local author), writing for purpose classes (in conjunction with Warwick University), Art therapy classes, educational children’s workshops (in conjunction with Coventry University), Get it Loud in Libraries (live gigs) and linking with 2021 City of Culture and Positive Images Festival to champion and celebrate literature.

All plans and activities are currently on hold due to COVID-19.

Future development

Future plans include using a local theatre to host a one off “Behind the Books” style talk with screenwriter Andrew Davies. There have also been talks with a local organisation to help ECCL to transform the small amount of outdoor space that they have available, potentially to utilise it as an outdoor meeting area for smaller groups.

The bookshop can continue outside the library (weather permitting) and an outdoor Big Book Sale has been planned for September 5th.

The library has also set up a WhatsApp book club after a local neighbourhood group suggested that it could be something to help the community during the pandemic. The group has 16 members of various different ages and occupations who read a wide variety of books. Their virtual meetings are free to attend.

Challenges and solutions

The main challenge for the management of ECCL is keeping volunteers engaged, particularly in the current climate whilst the library is shut, and ensuring that they are still willing to support the day-to-day running of the library once it reopens. ECCL are aware that a number of volunteers have left for various reasons since March and that others may be reluctant to return to volunteering due to health and safety concerns. In order to allay their fears, ECCL have made all of their risk assessments available to volunteers, created a video to show the new cleaning/safety procedures and have remained in weekly contact throughout lockdown via an emailed volunteer newsletter.

In terms of the wider library remit, it has always been difficult to reach local people who do not engage with social media. Throughout lockdown this has been even harder. ECCL has become involved in neighbourhood WhatsApp groups and has kept local councillors informed of any updates. Prior to reopening, ECCL are hoping to introduce a help point outside the library where members of the public can speak to an ECCL volunteer to ask them questions about the library, how and when it will reopen and how the new Select and Collect scheme will work. The local newspaper has been invaluable in getting messages out too and they have been a brilliant source of ongoing support.

It is also difficult to understand the needs of the local community, especially in the aftermath of COVID-19. ECCL are involved with a number of different agencies and are looking to become more involved in residents associations to become closer aligned with the issues facing local people.

Finally, it is a huge concern to ECCL that they are unable to bring in any income at the moment. Many revenue streams (events, the sale of drinks, even overdue fines) have been curtailed due to lockdown and it is unlikely that the situation will change in the short to medium term. Financially, ECCL is in a fortunate position as the council currently pay their utility bills and look after any building repairs but with only six months left under lease arrangements, the future is uncertain.

Learning

ECCL is just beginning its journey to becoming a community hub, but the most useful thing so far has been to find the local networks that exist within the community and get involved in as many of them as possible.

Communication at all levels has been key and ensuring that volunteers are fully aware of what's going on through messages, emails and face to face meetings has worked well for ECCL, although there is still room for improvement!

It was also very important to foster a good working relationship with the council's library management team as many of the schemes, events and initiatives that have been put into place could not have been done without their help.

Next steps for ECL

ECCL is currently working through its "Unfolding the Library" scheme, beginning with Select and Collect on 7th September. ECCL hope to slowly open up the library to browsers and computer users in the near future.

The Community Engagement Coordinator continues to create links within the local community and as needs have significantly changed within the past few months will continue to assess where the library can best provide support. A recent survey of the local community (attached) gave a number of clear indicators for ECCL's strategy focus over the next 12 months, including refreshing the book stock and ensuring that a wide range of interests are catered for.

A collaborative approach to events seems to be the best way forwards - utilising other venues as hosts (as with the Andrew Davies event taking place in a local theatre) and linking in with other artists/ creatives for larger projects like the 2021 City of Culture. Previously, events such as a wine tasting evening have been held at a local cafe bar which was very popular, so providing government restrictions can be upheld this is another potential area of opportunity.

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Fallowfield Library & Community Resource Centre

(The Place) Manchester



Introduction

Fallowfield Library and Community Resource Centre trading as 'The Place at Platt Lane', (also known as 'The Place') in Manchester is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO). The Library and Centre was transferred into community ownership from Manchester City Council via the community asset transfer process in July 2016 and is an example of a community managed library which operates as a vibrant community hub with a wide range of activities and services on offer.

Context

The Place is situated in the City of Manchester inner city ward of Fallowfield with a population of 16,513 as at 2018 which has grown from 12,728 in 2001. Located in a deprived Lower Super Output Areas (LSOA), it is amongst the 20% most deprived neighbourhoods in the country. Adjoining neighbourhoods in the Library's catchment area are in the 10% most deprived neighbourhoods in the country and residents of these form part of our core community.

The Library attracts and serves people from the wards of Fallowfield, Moss Side, Rusholme and Whalley Range but some of the activities and services we host attract people from further afield across Manchester and Greater Manchester.

The Library's role in the Community

The Place' provides wellbeing, learning, education, skills, employability and culture in the inner-city Manchester ward of Fallowfield also reaching people from the neighboring deprived wards of Moss Side, Rusholme and Walley Range. Beneficiaries include preschool age children through to the elderly, and from all ethnic and ability backgrounds. We support the unemployed, low skilled, financially excluded, socially isolated, people who want to take up new hobbies or learn new skills and those wishing to meet others.

The centre is managed by local people who fought very hard to save the much loved, used and needed resource from closure by Manchester City Council (MCC). They formed a CIO in 2014 to provide a focal point for this deprived community. A constituted community group called Friends of Fallowfield (FoF) was formed to lead and coordinate opposition to the closure and the group led a successful campaign to keep the library open.

Following capacity building, the charity was formed, we negotiated a lease for the facility via the community asset transfer process; all with support from the main local housing association, One Manchester (formerly City South Manchester). Funding from MCC and the Tudor Trust reconfigured and refurbished the facility, creating lettable space and sustainable income streams.

As members of the local community, CIO trustees are passionate about Fallowfield and the people who live here. They inform but also ensure all our services are shaped by the needs of local people, through consultations with the wider community and by developing new or improved offers based on their feedback.

The CIO and its volunteers have retained the library and its services supported by the community who mobilised and created an innovative solution to prevent the library's closure and to increase and improve services in the face of cuts. The Place is now a vibrant hub in the heart of the community, for people of all ages and abilities to develop their

skills, make friends and improve their well-being and life chances.

About the library service

The library service at The Place is operated via MCC Libraries in partnership with the CIO. We could never deliver a stand-alone service of similar reach, efficiency and professionalism because MCC already have the infrastructure, experience and connectivity in place and on an entirely different level to anything we could develop independently. We have excellent working relationships and the partnership works very well. All the MCC Libraries team deliver an excellent service at The Place.

Further, in the interim weekly library opening hours have increased by 8. These are now 23 hours per week from the initial 15, with the additional hours operating on a volunteer only basis (although volunteers can ring other MCC libraries on a designated 'buddy system' for support, advice and full system access via MCC Libraries staff).

In 2019/20 books issued was 10,672. Active members (borrowed books or used PC's) was 1,914 (a 15% increase on last year and the 4th biggest percentage increase across all 22 libraries in Manchester).

Library PC usage by library members was 14,203 hours usage (a 14% increase on last year). The number of visits to library was 43,598 (registered via Door Counter and a 4% increase on last year and the 5th biggest percentage increase across all 22 libraries in Manchester)

Overall volunteering hours was 4,150 in 2019/20. Library volunteers contributed 2,302 hours and the remaining hours of 1,848 hours were spent on the Community Grocer, Credit Union and other activities. Throughout the period covered above the library was open for 23 hours per week. The wider Community Resource Centre is open 7 days per week and also most evenings.

The Place as a community hub

Prior to the community asset transfer, the primary function of The Place was very much as a library per se, which had a few ancillary activities and services of community benefit on the periphery. Since the transfer, we now see ourselves more as a busy community hub, hosting and offering a range of services for the community benefit, with a community library at its heart. The library is an

integral and fundamental part of our wider offer and is often the feature that brings new people into our centre for the first time. However, our emphasis is definitely geared more towards meeting the many and diverse needs and aspirations within our community and the library is now but one of a whole suite of activities/services rather than being our sole or central focus.

We identified the needs and aspirations of the local community through ongoing community consultation and then provide a raft of activities and services to address these (see Appendix I 'Recent performance' details). Everything we do now and intend to do in the future will be on the basis of meeting identified community needs via our survey findings, wider community input and social value analysis. This is a diverse community exhibiting clear signs of social deprivation across many of the established indicators.

As a result of the above consultations our focus has increasingly moved towards enhancing the wellbeing of the local community and we see the wide range of activities and services available here as being complementary to this objective as well as being socially useful and beneficial in their own right as stand-alone activities.

Covid-19

Our activities and services have developed over time and, under normal circumstances, we would have expected to continue growing these in the current year. However, we closed to the public on 21/03/20 because of the coronavirus pandemic, so all activities listed ceased on or shortly before this date.

At the time of writing this case study (14/08/20) this remains the case, although we are just now exploring some very limited resumptions under strict Covid19 restrictions and risk mitigation, including: Holy Trinity Church have resumed Sunday services as of 26/07/20; MP Advice Surgeries are set to resume on 18/09/20 and Talk English ESOL sessions on 17/09/20. Discussions are also ongoing with MCC Libraries regarding when and on what basis our library can reopen. Latest expectation is that we should open on reduced days and/or hours towards the end of September 2020, but the full details are still to be confirmed.

We have conducted a rigorous Covid 19 Risk Assessment process predicated upon the governments 'Covid 19: Guidance for the safe use

of multi-purpose community facilities' and put all required risk control and mitigation measures in place. We also require each group or organisation wishing to resume activities with us to provide us their own written risk assessment detailing how they will manage their group during sessions in a manner compliant with our own risk assessment requirements and risk mitigation measures.

Long term sustainability

In terms of impact on our finances, our closure has seen room hire income this finance year so far fall to zero. In 2019/20 we generated over £34,000 from room hire and had expected this to increase to at least £38,000 in 2020/21 before Covid 19 intervened; at this stage we have no way of knowing what the overall impact will be across the whole year. However, we have been successful with applications for emergency funding the 'Retail, Hospitality & Leisure Grant' (£25,000) and National Lottery Community Fund (£17,500) so these mitigate against the projected room hire losses.

Our normal trading model is based on generating income from both external grant funders and room hire. Our long-term aspiration has always been to move towards self-generating an increasing proportion of our overall income via room hire charges. Up until the current year this strategy was working, and we have generated an ever increasing proportion of overall income from room hire each year from our inception. However, Covid 19 has severely disrupted this trend and we will inevitably fall well back in this regard this year.

Our long-term strategy remains to develop our own income stream via room hire in order to move towards financial self-sustainability. However, in essence we remain a public library (albeit a community run one with many other activities and services offered) and it remains the case that such entities have always attracted some form of subsidy (public or otherwise) since their inception in the mid to late 19th Century so it is perhaps a moot point whether total financial self-reliance is a realistic aspiration? Therefore we recognise that, certainly in the short to medium term, it is vital for us to secure external funding towards our core costs – such funding will provide essential breathing space and enable us to maximise our revenue streams.

If there are any positives to be drawn from the current situation it has served as a reminder that

our interests going forward are best served by continuing to adopt a mixed economy model. Had we relied on room hire to a greater extent than is the case then we would have been exposed to serious financial risk arising from our enforced closure. Having significant income from diverse streams has certainly helped us ride out the pandemic in much better financial shape than many VCS sector organisations.

We have repurposed ourselves during the lockdown and The Place has been leading a mutual aid initiative alongside a local community volunteer group that has strong links with the council, local councillors, local housing associations, and local voluntary and statutory workers in the area, based around a Facebook group called Fallowfield Vs Coronavirus (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/208699667109369/>); it is essentially a combined community effort to assist local people in Fallowfield experiencing food shortages and also signposts people to other kinds of support. Non-perishable food has been purchased at and stored at The Place for collection and delivery by local volunteers to local people in need who contact the group via a widely promoted phone number. The group is very active in supporting requests for food support and we expect this to continue as local people struggle to get back to jobs and work places due to the continuing economic fallout from the pandemic, especially as the furlough scheme winds down. The links at the end of this study highlight the great work that has been, and continues to be, going on at The Place during the current circumstances:

We've also been busy securing the funding to underpin these activities, and have brought in around £15,000 from Forever Manchester, We Love Manchester, two Neighbourhood Investment Fund (NIF) grants for Fallowfield, and One Manchester Holiday Hunger grant – all of which are to purchase food and wellbeing items for distribution to local people in need by our volunteers. So although technically we've been closed to the public, there has been an enormous amount of stuff going on in response to the situation.

Co-located services

We share our building with 'buzz', Manchester's NHS Health & Wellbeing Service, who have

one of their two main offices upstairs whilst we are on the ground floor. This arose by happy coincidence rather than design but nevertheless,

the organisations do engage in significant joint working. The main aim of buzz is to improve the health and wellbeing of people and communities in Manchester, to help individuals and families live fuller, healthier, happier and longer lives. There is no direct contractual relationship, 'buzz' were already in situ when we took over the lease for the ground floor and they are tenants of MCC, not of the CIO.

Future development

We are continually seeking to develop our offer to the local community, so this remains an ongoing process. There are no plans to change our premises at the moment, but our initial lease was for a period of 5 years and expires on 6th March 2021. At the time of our community asset transfer, MCC policy was to offer new organisations such as ourselves an initial 5 years to prove themselves, with future lease extension subject to performance. There is no question that we have passed this test with flying colours and we are already in talks to renew our lease on a much longer terms basis. It is early days and detailed discussions are scheduled for October 2020, but early indications are that MCC regard us as a very safe pair of hands and the renewal/extension is likely to be a formality.

At present, we face the challenge of a gradual reopening from the Covid 19 closure period. It is too early to say how this will proceed simply because there are still too many unknown factors, including whether there will be a second wave locally, regionally or nationally. Therefore we need to remain agile enough to react to changes in restrictions taken from government guidance. Alongside this we need to also be proactive in ensuring that we maintain dialogue with delivery partners and groups, so we (and they) are able to resume their activities with us (even if in amended format to ensure social distancing and any other restrictions) in a safe manner and as soon as possible.

We are still providing emergency support to those in need affected by Covid 19 and are also ready to step in should there be any upsurge in demand, whether this be from a second wave of the virus or as a result of the economic fallout likely to arise after furlough ends (sadly, we expect many in our community to lose their employment).

Challenges and solutions

The first challenge we faced was persuading MCC to lease the facility to us, especially as we were

something of an unknown entity as a group working to form a CIO (and then as a newly formed CIO with no prior track record). Finding a solution required a lot of dialogue with MCC (including Libraries, Estates and Legal). It helped that One Manchester (OM) were involved in the formation of the CIO because they already had connections with MCC and therefore had considerable influence. However, it is important to note that the CIO is entirely independent of OM (as it has to be in order to meet Charity Commission criteria and scrutiny). Nonetheless OM did help to open a few doors (and ears and minds). Another part of the solution was that we also had all three local councillors on board, with all actively campaigning to keep the library open. Again, this helped us to establish a platform for dialogue, discussion and negotiation.

A key factor was the fact that MCC Libraries had no great appetite or desire to close the library but were in a difficult situation caused by austerity cuts imposed from elsewhere. They were very receptive to finding a creative solution which, taken together with the factors above, made this process much smoother than it might have been.

The next stage was to secure revenue or core funding to support the running costs of the centre. Our business plan forecasts that income generation will continue to grow in future to gradually converge towards our core running costs and therefore towards a viable and sustainable future for the CIO. However, in order for us to build our own (non grant dependent) revenue and income streams, we definitely needed grant income alongside this to provide time and breathing space. Subsequent events (i.e. unforeseeable closure due to Covid 19) have clearly demonstrated that a mixed economy approach (i.e. a combination of self-generated income and external grant income) provides the best way of managing financial risks and providing financial viability and sustainability, rather than 'having all the eggs in one basket'. In this case, the solution is to have staff and/or volunteers who are adept and experienced in sourcing and procuring funding.

Learning

A useful lesson is to identify key relationships at as early a stage as possible and cultivate these via relationship building and ongoing relationship management to engender the spirit of partnership that is required to make things work to the benefit of all parties concerned. This is all about people

skills, but as there has never yet been a community asset transfer that didn't involve people, whilst this might seem an obvious point, it is nonetheless a crucial one.

Another critical factor to consider at the very earliest opportunity is to research potential models and identify the one that best fits your situation and circumstances. We opted for the CIO model and have never had cause to regret our decision. This model works for us and has opened up lots of potential funding avenues from which we have secured significant amounts to cover both initial capital costs and ongoing revenue costs. However, although this works well for us and is undoubtedly the best fit for our situation, it might well not be the best fit for others. So the key point is to fully research the options, take advice from relevant parties and think through how you wish to operate and which of the available options will best facilitate this.

We believe the above to be innovative and is a clear example of asset-based community development as a method for the sustainable development of our community based on its own strengths and potential. It has involved the community assessing the resources, skills, and experience available within itself; the community organising itself around issues that have moved its members into action; and the community determining and taking the appropriate actions for itself

Next steps or The Place

- To reopen after our temporary closure in a safe manner and subject to ongoing risk mitigation and control measures.
- To gradually build up our activities and services to levels approaching pre lockdown levels, so that the community gets access to the support it needs and the CIO increases income from room hire.
- To negotiate and agree our lease renewal and extension (current lease expires 6th March 2021).
- To upgrade our website (this is underway but far from completed) to better portray our offer to the community, potential delivery partners and prospective funders.

Information and Contacts

Rob Willis (Centre Development and Partnership Manager) Mobile: 07875 009616 Email: rob.willis@onemanchester.co.uk

Useful Resources

Fallowfield vs Coronavirus

Article on Northern Quota website
<https://thenorthernquota.org/news/fallowfield-library-brings-community-closer-through-lockdown-initiative>

The above is an article on us in the Northern Quota, which is a news website run by staff and students from MMU's Multimedia Journalism courses. Article from the Forever Manchester email newsletter / website

The link below is from Forever Manchester's weekly email Newsletter; we were one of five organisations featured and the article covers our activity working as a lead partner in the 'Fallowfield versus Coronavirus' group:

"Welcome to your Forever Manchester Newsletter. This week we bring you another 5 stories of amazing community groups responding to the impact of Covid-19".

https://forevermanchester.com/supporting-our-local-heroes-the-place-at-platt-lane-fallowfield-manchester/?utm_campaign=350494_29%2005%2020%20Newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Forever%20Manchester&dm_i=557N,71FY,2ZUJ47,T8FR,I

APPENDIX I

Recent performance – Activities and Services

Activities, Courses and Services hosted/delivered at The Place (01/04/19 – 31/03/20):

1. The 'Community Grocer at The Place' traded every Friday morning 9.00 a.m. to 12.00 noon throughout the year – this is run in conjunction with Healthy Me Healthy Communities and is facilitated by a team of local volunteers all of which have received appropriate training (including Food Safety & Hygiene);
2. Fallowfield & Withington Food Bank operated from The Place each Wednesday 5.00 pm to 6.30 pm and we are the busiest of their four local Distribution Centres, the Food Bank is facilitated

by a team of local volunteers;

- 3.** The 'Read & Feed' initiative ran each weekday for six weeks throughout the school summer holidays in July and August 2019. This addressed holiday hunger for children who would otherwise have gone without a mid day meal and provided a stimulating educational (and fun!) environment for them. This initiative had been piloted at The Place (it was the City of Manchester pilot) in 2017 and was successful and delivery at The Place in 2018 and 2019 was part of wider delivery across the city;
- 4.** Manchester Adult Education Service (MAES) delivered Talk English ESOL classes each term time Thursday 10.00 am to 12.00 noon. This is aimed to support non English speaking people at Pre Entry & Entry Level 1 ESOL level so they can gain the language skills to integrate within the wider community and access basic services and other opportunities that they would otherwise be excluded from;
- 5.** Forever Young elderly persons group met each Monday 1.00pm-3.00pm throughout the operative report period – this group was established to combat loneliness and social isolation by providing a friendly, accessible, stimulating and supportive environment for older local people;
- 6.** Forever Young elderly persons I.T. sub group met each Friday 11.00am-1.00pm throughout the operative report period;
- 7.** A 'Knit & Natter' knitting group ran each Thursday 2.30pm-4.30pm throughout the year;
- 8.** The three Councillors for Fallowfield Ward operated a weekly drop in session each Monday 5.30pm-6.30pm (with the exception of Bank Holidays, when no Councillors' surgeries operate in Manchester) throughout the operative reporting period;
- 9.** The local MP ran an MP's Advice Surgery (appointment based) every third Friday of each month throughout the year;
- 10.** South Manchester Credit Union operated from The Place each Thursday and Saturday morning 10.00am-1.00pm throughout the operative period;
- 11.** Citizens Advice Bureau Manchester delivered a weekly Advice Session each Thursday 10.00am-1.00pm throughout the year;
- 12.** Self Help Services (mental health support charity) ran weekly appointment sessions each Wednesday 9.00am-4.30pm throughout the operative period;
- 13.** Work Club sessions ran each Tuesday 9.30pm-4.00pm throughout the operative period;
- 14.** Additional Work Club 1-2-1 tailored support sessions were held every Wednesday 9.30pm-4.00pm throughout the operative period;
- 15.** 'One Money' Debt Advice/Financial Inclusion service ran each Thursday 10.00am-4.00pm and on most Friday mornings 9.00am-13.00pm throughout the operative period;
- 16.** A SLAA addiction support group ran each Thursday evening 7.00pm-9.30pm throughout the operative period;
- 17.** Story Time (parent & toddler group) ran each Thursday morning 10.30am-11.30am (term time only) throughout the operative period;
- 18.** ABL Healthcare ran an 'Enable' weight management & healthy lifestyle programme each Wednesday 12.00 noon-4.00pm until 13/09/19 when their contract finished (please note: this commissioned activity was replaced by new activity delivered by MoreLife
- 19.** ABL Healthcare delivered a fortnightly 'Choose to Change' weight management & healthy lifestyle programme every other Tuesday 12.00 noon-4.00pm until 13/08/19 when their contract finished (please note: this commissioned activity was replaced by new activity delivered by MoreLife – see below);
- 20.** MoreLife weight management commenced two lots of commissioned activity every Tuesday 12.00pm-20.00pm commencing 05/11/19 and continuing throughout the year;
- 21.** Reed Momenta ran commissioned Tackling Diabetes sessions on a twice monthly basis on Wednesdays 13.00pm-16.30pm throughout the year;
- 22.** ICS Health & Wellbeing commenced commissioned Diabetes Awareness and Prevention sessions on 01/10/19, these ran fortnightly on Tuesdays 10am-4pm until 10/12/19 and then ran monthly from 07/01/20;
- 23.** NCT charity ran a series of regular full day Tutorials and Study Days for students on a Foundation Degree course – these ran periodically throughout the operative period;
- 24.** Evolve Tuition delivered their tuition classes

each Saturday morning 10.00am-1.00pm (term time only) throughout the operative period;

- 25.** A Homework Club for local schoolchildren aged 8 to 16 ran each term time Tuesday 3.30pm-5pm (after school) throughout the year;
- 26.** Grateful Church held their weekly sessions each Wednesday evening 6.30pm-8.30pm throughout the year;
- 27.** Holy Trinity Church held their weekly service each Sunday morning 9.00am-12.00 noon and also a weekly activity session each Tuesday evening 12.00pm-21.30pm throughout the year;
- 28.** Fallowfield Community Choir held their rehearsals each second and fourth Wednesday of the month 6.30pm-8pm throughout the operative period;
- 29.** A Children's Craft Club ran each Monday 4.30pm-5.30pm (term time only) throughout the year;
- 30.** A series of Enterprise Workshops designed to assist people wishing to set up their own businesses ran throughout the year 10.00am-16.00pm (various days/dates);
- 31.** 'Be Well' Advisers held several weekly appointment sessions 10am-16.00pm on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays, commencing on 29/07/19 and continuing throughout;
- 32.** Volunteers contributed at least 4,150 hours in total in 2019/20; 2,302 hours supporting the Community Library and the remainder volunteering on Community Grocer, Credit Union and other activities.

Glen Hills Community Managed Library and The Park Café

Blaby South Leicestershire

Introduction

Glen Hills Community Managed Library is an example of a local library that is run by volunteers but as a former County Council managed provision is still supported



by the library service. We are of particular interest as we are run through the parish council under “Power of Competence”. In Leicestershire there is a three-tier structure of local government: the County Council, District Councils and Parish Councils. When the County Council sought to hand over day to day running of community libraries, only Parish Councils who had a manager/clerk with a Certificate in Local Administration were eligible to put in a bid, as the CILCA confers the ability for parishes to manage their own finances. Most community libraries were handed over to charitable trusts that were specially constituted.

Being a Parish Managed Library has many advantages but several disadvantages; the biggest disadvantage is that we receive no rates remission and are ineligible to apply for much grant funding. The advantages far outweigh the disadvantages; we have administrative support from the Parish Office and all financial matters are handled for us. As the Parish owns the library building, utilities and cleaning are through the same providers. The Library Committee is a constituted subcommittee of the main council and is composed of councillors and representatives from the library working party, who meet separately and organise the daily running of the library and café

Context

Glen Hills CML is in the civil parish of Glen Parva in the Blaby district of South Leicestershire with a population of 17,189. Glen Parva is a relatively prosperous area with a high level of home ownership and a 10% lower than the national average rate of claiming benefits. It also has a lower than average rate of residents from overseas and is largely mono cultural. However, there is a larger than average number of elderly residents and this leads to social isolation and lack of access to digital culture. There are few social meeting places in the parish which borders on to Leicester City and South Wigston.

Role in the community

The library and cafe has become a social hub for the community and provides a range of activities for older residents and school age children. Since we became a CML in 2015 the range of provision of additional activities has been largely in response to customer requests. The library and cafe provide a safe and friendly place for people of all ages to meet and has done a great deal to address social isolation. We are a local “Safe Place” and a dementia friendly organisation; several volunteers have undergone specific training.

The local McMillan coffee morning is hosted in the library and the knitters raise funds for charitable organisations. The following quotes from our users demonstrate how the library responds to the needs of our community and mitigates social isolation.

About the library services

Before COVID 19 the opening hours of the library had increased from 13, under the County Council, to 32 in a provision entirely provided by volunteers. The library was purely a place to borrow books. From annual issue of 5303 our tally has gone to 7509 and new borrowers from 116 annually to 207.

Before becoming a CML the library had one of the lowest footfalls in the county. Our latest annual report shows that we had 22,386 visits in the year October 2019 to 2020. This includes library and cafe visits and participation in activities.

Glen Hills developing as a community hub

Originally, the plan to save the library and the cafe was to raise funds to defray expenses. However,

it soon became obvious that there was a need in the vicinity for a social meeting place. Many of our volunteers were living alone and enjoyed the social aspect of serving the community. Requests were made to set up activities and in many cases the people who made the suggestions were happy to run them. An example is the Creative Writing Group; after a talk from a local author several people who attended said how nice it would be to have our own group. The author organised an introductory session and introduced to someone who was willing to be a group leader.

From one book group our additional activities have grown to:

- 3 reading groups
- Weekly Stories and Rhyme for preschool children
- LEGO holiday club
- Regular links and visits from the local primary school and preschool group
- Knit and Natter group meeting twice a week and raising funds for the library
- Creative Writing group
- One to One IT support
- Regular evening events including quizzes and talks
- Knit and Natter
- Stories & Rhyme
- Creative Writing
- New writers' group in Glen Parva



All levels of experience welcome from aspiring to confident writers. Come along and share your writing and bring your work into the daylight.

Weekly from Tuesday 4th July 2017 18.00 to 19.30

Cost: £3.00 per session

Come along to Glen Hills Library at:

50 Dorothy Avenue, Glen Parva, Leicester LE2 9JD

For more information, please drop into the Library or phone 0116 2787720

By joining the creative writing group, I have become more confident and learnt so much about other members' choice of writing and to correct mistakes I make in my stories. I look forward to every Tuesday evenings, surrounded by other creative and inspirational members. **ROBYN**

When I joined the Writers' Group, I was very much the odd one out, living on the far side of the city and knowing only Glen. However, the welcome was warm. I greatly enjoy listening to the amazing variation members can give to the tasks we are set. I don't do clever or weird and usually chose to write stories. I've gone from a trembling wreck when reading my work to being reasonably confident thanks to the encouragement I've received. **JANET MALLOY 83**

Katie and I started story and Rhyme time not long after the library re-opened. It has been an absolute pleasure welcoming the little ones to the library. Every Wednesday we invite 0 - 5's to enjoy stories and join us for a good old sing song. Over the years we have seen so many children grow and learn, from their very first twinkly stars to marching along with The Grand Old Duke of York. It's always sad to see the older kids move on to nursery or play school. However, this is tempered with the delight of welcoming a new lot of tiny tots. We've developed a wonderful little community of parents, and grandparents, who are always willing to lend a hand. **REBEKAH**

Co-located services

The library forms part of the Glen Parva Parish offices which has the parish office and two halls for hire. There are regular activities in the halls, including a preschool and several sports groups. We have regular visits to the library and cafe from the users; an example of this is the dance group that meets on Friday afternoons and Saturday mornings. The children and parents use the library and cafe and several attend our additional activities. The local police use the library to run their beat surgery, which always has customers. Blaby District Council run the local Health Walk from the library.

Covid-19

The pandemic has had a devastating effect on our community hub. As we were in the extended Leicester lockdown for three weeks (despite being in the county), our reopening plans were delayed. We have started by offering Click and Collect twice a week and will gradually add browsing sessions and reopen the cafe. Additional activities will not be possible until January at the earliest. It is extremely

discouraging but there is still a demand for social activities, so we can certainly go back to being a community hub when restrictions are relaxed. Most volunteers are happy to return, although we have lost several key workers. Funding is an issue.

Future development

The effect of the Covid-19 restrictions has meant we are re-building our service from scratch. Our plans are:

Stage 1: From 27th July

Click/phone and Collect with book return

Customers can phone or email to order books by genre or author & pick up from library. Orders are fulfilled, checked out and put in a paper carrier on a table near the door. Customers given a specific time to collect books. Returns are placed in a plastic crate and discharged 72 hours later. Two volunteers only on duty.

Stage 2: From 7th September

Booked sessions for families or individuals to run on different days to click and collect, which will continue

Stage 3: From 5th October

Library services, including IT reintroduced. No additional activities yet.

Cafe reopened.



Stage 4: From January 2021

Reintroduction of group activities

Challenges and solutions

Funding has been an issue but we have managed to obtain a small contingency grant from the

Leicestershire County Council who also gave us permission to use Section 106 money to buy PPE equipment and cleaning materials to set up for a safe reopening. We are exploring the availability of other grants and may be able to access Cultural Communities funds to help us reintroduce activities.

Several volunteers are not comfortable to return so, although we have enough to staff our reduced opening hours, we may need to recruit more in future. We can use our local Voluntary Action forum to help.

Learning

Listen to your volunteers and users and join local and national support groups. The additional activities that worked best for us were those that were requested, rather than what we thought people might like. Be flexible and prepared to change things that are not going to plan. Value your volunteers, have regular meetings and celebrate success.

Next Steps for the organisation

We need to concentrate on rebuilding our services. Long term, we plan to seek funding for an extension to accommodate the increasing demand for activities and group meetings.

Information and Contacts

Details about the library can be found at:

www.glenparvaparishcouncil.org.uk

–choose Glen Hills Library from drop down menu

Facebook: Glen Hills Library and Park Cafe

Twitter: @libraryparkcafe

Instagram: @glenparvaparishcouncil

Getting Help

Linda Sidorowicz

Volunteer Coordinator – Glen Hills CML

linda.sidorowicz@gmail.com

Telephone number: 07769698194



Greenhill Community Library Sheffield

Introduction

“Friends of Greenhill Library” started out in 2013 as a group of individuals campaigning against Sheffield City Council’s proposal to close eleven of its local libraries. We were not successful in persuading the council to continue to run the libraries; instead, we were invited to submit a business plan to operate the library ourselves. We opened under volunteer control in October 2014. Initially nervous, we have steadily grown in experience and confidence in managing the library and steadily expanded our programme of events. We are registered as a CIO (Charitable Incorporated Organisation). The council owns our building which we hold on a 25 year lease; we are responsible for maintenance.

Context

Greenhill Community Library, on the south edge of the city, is one of eleven community-run libraries in Sheffield. We hold a stock of around 15,000 books and (pre-lockdown) were open 26 hours a

week and issuing about 2,400 books per month on average. Though entirely volunteer-run, we remain part of the Sheffield City Council’s library system, and receive a tapering support grant from them (although increasingly our income derives from our own fundraising efforts).

Role in the community

The library serves the comparatively affluent areas of Greenhill and Bradway and (to a lesser extent) Lowedges, a more deprived area of relatively low-income families. In addition to providing traditional public lending library services, since taking over the running of the library in 2014 the volunteers have considerably extended our offering to the community, either by using the library space to host other events (for example artisan markets, U3A meetings, cinema evenings) or by organising outside events (for example “open gardens” weekends and recently a scarecrow festival).

The hard work and professionalism of our volunteers are what make our library a success. We are blessed with an excellent team, many of whom are retired professional people. There are 139 on our database though not all are active, and some have limited roles e.g. delivering newsletters or cutting the lawn.

About the library services

Our core services include traditional book borrowing (principally fiction, biography and children’s books), photocopying and printing, public access computers (we have 9 which we purchased

to replace the old and slow machines provided by the council) and supply of hearing aid batteries (!)

Our book stock is a mixture of books inherited from or funded by the council, and books donated by the public or bought from our own funds. Circulation of the non-council books, which we refer to as our “Yellow Sticker” stock, is handled by a separate web-based library management system (Koha), we also assisted four other Sheffield libraries to migrate to this system. Yellow sticker book issues have steadily increased and now account for just over 50% of the total issues; we expect this trend to continue.

Greenhill as a community hub

We now consider ourselves as a “community hub with a library at its core” and our by-line is “more than just books”.

As a result we now deliver a wide range of activities and services, (all currently shut down due to Covid-19) that include:

- Evening talks (one per month) including some musical events
- Cinema screenings (one per month for adults, one for children)
- Story-time for young children
- Fun time for babies and toddlers
- Chatterbooks for children 8-11 and Children’s craft sessions
- Two book clubs
- Coffee mornings every Friday
- Farmer’s and Artisan Markets (3 a year)
- A knit-and-natter group
- Various U3A meetings (maths, architecture, Spanish, ...)
- Computer help sessions on Friday mornings

We have also run a small number of larger-scale events; A Mad Hatters Tea Party, a Harry Potter day

and (currently on hold) a Wizard of Oz day.

... we suggested Barbara [recently widowed] might like to come to library coffee mornings. She eventually did this, accompanied by her neighbour, and became a regular. This morning she mentioned how much she had enjoyed the coffee mornings and how they had helped her gain confidence (she used to do everything together with her husband).

Community benefit



It is difficult to quantitatively measure our benefit to the community, but we know from a large body of anecdotal evidence (on social media and elsewhere) that we have been instrumental in combating social isolation, in fostering the engagement of local children with people of all ages, and the enrichment of the “cultural life” of the community.

It is also important to remember the benefit that our volunteers gain from their association with the library ... a sense of purpose, satisfaction in giving something to the community, and friendships developed within the cohort of volunteers.

Greenhill library is a successfully run library run by local volunteers. I am really impressed with what is achieved by this super group and the services that the library provides. When the original decision was made [to close the libraries] I thought that it would be the end of Greenhill Library but how wrong I was! This is definitely one library that does NOT need to go back to being council run.

Lowedges Community Library has been an inspiration to me in terms of self confidence building, meeting and communicating with the community. I have enjoyed every bit of when we were opened including while distributing the flyers. My short period with the library while we were open has given me the courage to complete an NCFE level 2 online Customer Services while we were shut. I am hoping to build and improve on my skills towards future employment opportunities.

Future development

We have plans in place to develop the building by the provision of better toilets (including disabled access), an enlarged kitchen, and a community room. The latter will enable us to host events, exhibitions etc. at times when the library is open for public browsing, something we cannot do at the moment. We have planning permission for all of this and are in the early stages of applying for funding.

We have also established a small branch library in the Lowedges Community Centre to serve the local community. This opened in February of this year only to close down again due to lockdown at the end of March. It is our intention to re-open this when circumstances permit.

Challenges and solutions

The biggest challenge (or “threat” perhaps?) is over-reliance on a small number of key people, the loss of whom, for whatever reason, would seriously impact our operation. We are aware of the need for succession planning but find this hard to put into practice.

Funding is, of course, a potential challenge but we have been successful in building a substantial reserve of unrestricted funds through event-based income. This has been helped by winning various restricted pots of money which have allowed us to undertake some work (e.g. book purchasing, double glazing, new build feasibility studies) without dipping into unreserved funds.

Learning

It has been important to us that the council has continued to offer us support, in the form of a tapering grant, three council library employees (who support all 11 libraries) and ongoing access to the

infrastructure that has allowed us to remain a part of the council library services. Councils handing over libraries to volunteers should not push them off a financial cliff by abrupt withdrawal of funding. Libraries need time to build their fundraising activities.

It has also taken time to build trust with the council (and also with local schools) and have them acknowledge the quality of service we provide.

Next steps

Right now, we are working to restore a semblance of normal library service following the pandemic. We are successfully operating a click&collect service and plan to re-open to the public for “limited browsing” on 7 September. One current challenge is the age distribution of our volunteers, many of whom fall into the “clinically vulnerable” category. We have no plans yet to begin restoring other non-core services and it is difficult to think beyond simply “getting back to normal”. In the longer term, it is unlikely that we will significantly expand beyond our normal offer of services events (and of course the opportunities provided by the new build described above) though we are always open to suggestions and enthusiasm from volunteers to try new things.

Information and Contacts

Web site: <https://greenhill-library.org>

Facebook: [facebook.com/froglis](https://www.facebook.com/froglis), we have 900 followers

Getting Help Main contact: Chris Brown (Chair, Friends of Greenhill Library)

email: support@greenhill-library.org



Harbury Village Library (HVL) and Biblio's Café

Warwickshire



Introduction

Harbury is a village in rural Warwickshire of about 2,700 inhabitants. It has a socially mixed community but is largely mono-cultural. Borrowers come primarily from the village itself and surrounding villages and a few from the towns of Southam, Leamington and Warwick which are all within a 6 mile radius. These towns also have their own local authority-run libraries.

HVL was established as a volunteer run community library in 2012 when the local council suggested it would be closed. It is situated in the old Victorian school building in the centre of the village. There was and remains considerable support for the continuance of a library from bodies such as the Parish Council and the community as a whole. While benefitting from a peppercorn rent, a café (or internet café, as it was quaintly called) was set up at the same time to cover the day to day running costs of the building and to provide a social space for villagers. Although well served by pubs, there were no commercial cafés in the village.

The café is open four mornings each week. The café

is a very popular community meeting place, as the coffee and home baked cakes are of high standard. It is particularly attractive to groups of young mothers and other carers and older members of the community. Many come regularly every week at the same time.

HVL is managed by a steering committee of trustees on which the library and café have separate representatives, who report back to their own committees of four or five volunteers. In addition, there is a representative from the church (the landlord), the parish council, the primary school and a treasurer.

About the library service

The library is open five and a half days a week, in contrast to the two days when council run. In addition to the book stock provided by the council, we have built up our own collection of about 4000 books (the Blue Label Collection – BLC) through donation and purchase which are loaned alongside the local authority books. We loan out approximately 300 books a week and have about 350 combined visitors weekly to both the café and library. The breakdown between loans of council books to our BLC books is two-thirds, one-third. We have enrolled over 1300 members to our BLC: a large proportion of the population. We also provide a free shelf of books to take away, which is popular particularly at holiday times with people who fear forgetting library items.

In total we have nearly 100 volunteers, including café bakers and servers, of whom about 25 do regular weekly four hour shifts behind the library desk. Apart from a cleaner, we have no paid employees. Most of the volunteers are retired and many are over 70. They are mostly women, with a fair proportion of men. In 2019 HVL was delighted to have been awarded the Queen's Award for Volunteering in recognition of our efforts.

HVL as a Community Hub

As detailed above, the integral café plays a very important part in the social life of the community and has been much missed during the Coronavirus crisis. In the past, we have hosted a special dementia café which only moved on when it became too large, and a sewing group and several Duke of Edinburgh Award groups. We currently host a board game afternoon and loan out board games and jigsaw puzzles. We have run book quizzes, host two book groups, and a writers' group. We have an art

display by local artists, whose work is for sale and is changed regularly, thus providing a good showroom within the village. Some of the artists also design greetings cards which we sell.

We provide two public access computers with printing and laminating facilities. We provide free access to the Ancestry website for family history and ran free introductory classes on this by an expert. We also have free access to a newspaper archive which is useful for researchers and contributed to the work done for an exhibition on the role of villagers in WWI.

Last year we began language classes in Spanish and French. Against the odds the popular Spanish classes finished the academic year in July online, and we hope both will recommence shortly.

The library website has hosted a seedling/ seed share during lockdown this year, and in conjunction with Live and Local, a council initiative, we have coordinated a writing and art project which will lead to a book and an exhibition reflecting villagers' experience during lockdown.

We have been running a very successful number of evening events, including speakers connected with books such as the local TV/film script writer Andrew Davies, other local authors and a local publisher, and other associated areas such as Mary Rhodes, the news broadcaster from BBC Midlands TV.



We have also had informative talks on wills/ powers of attorney and cyber crime, for instance. For the last three years we have held a murder mystery evening written and performed by village residents, which not only provides an enjoyable night out and raises funds, but brings in new people to see what the library can offer.

Each summer (apart from this one) we have run the Summer Reading Challenge for children and supplemented this with other craft activities for children during the summer holidays.



We have a weekly Tunes and Tales session for toddlers, and children from the attached pre-school come through the 'magic door' every week for a story or two read by one of our volunteers. Additionally, each year group from the local primary school visits once a term to do a library activity associated with their project work.

Because the library is very central, we have been able to be used as a hub to provide a service for various village activities, among which are: selling tickets for the panto, the theatre group, PTA fundraising etc; the site for the scouts' and guides' Christmas post box; bookings for the local tennis courts; collecting food for the local hedgehog shelter; and a collection point for funds raised to support the community shop when it was damaged during a robbery. The local parish councillors hold their monthly surgeries here.

We have run a Local History display in conjunction with the local Heritage Room and are planning more co-operation with them in their re-vamped form in future. The local history display was designed to correspond with the arrival of new residents of a large new estate in the village, both to tell them a little more about the area and to introduce them to the library. Publicity leaflets were delivered directly to the new estate. We have also been the venue for information sessions on local issues such as HS2, the landslip in the railway cutting, community policing and other planning matters.

We have served as a model and provided information for other community groups who were thinking of running their own CML, and have been visited by various groups from Northamptonshire, Leicestershire and environs; and as far away as Essex and Myanmar, the latter organised by the British Council.

Covid 19

We closed HVL a week before the official Lockdown in recognition of the vulnerability of our volunteers and visitors. During the pandemic, we have provided home delivery services to those isolating and shielding, and were able to provide a Takeaway and Click and Collect service with quarantined books from our own BLC from May, thanks to having a separate computer and efficient catalogue. We reopened the library for browsing with a twice a week, two hours opening in mid-July, again just using our own books as the county council were not yet in a position to support

loaning their books. We are continuing with this for the time being, as we had to do a lot of book moving/shelf shifting to accommodate Covid secure requirements. We were very encouraged by the response of our volunteers, who without exception wish to return. The café has also been providing a takeaway service since July.

Future Development

Firstly, we hope to get back to 'normality' and re-open with all our services described above. Our main area of interest for the future, which we had begun to look into and organise at a very preliminary stage before Lockdown, was the possibility of establishing a repair café and/ or a library of things. Some work, meetings and visits had been undertaken but nothing as yet finally agreed or established.

Challenges and Solutions

HVL has been extremely lucky in that the success of Biblio's Café has meant that we have been financially sound from early on for day to day expenses and have not had to spend time and effort in applying for grants etc. In recent years we have also had the benefit of section 106 money from local developers which allowed us to undertake a major refurbishment of the library fittings in 2018. Other sources of income include commission from the artwork sales and hangings, hiring the café space and printing charges and fines, but these are relatively unimportant compared with the café and s.106 funds.

Our main challenges are lack of space for storage and admin procedures (our 'office' is two locked filing cabinets in the public toilet), and in order to develop and house the 'future areas' mentioned above. We also have an elderly building to maintain – there have been leaks this summer with all the torrential rain. Additionally, we continue to work on trying to encourage wider participation in the activities and services provided by HVL. To this end, we try to organise a variety of events and have a website, a Facebook and Instagram page plus a regular column in the local monthly magazine.

We would also like to be able to rely on a new generation of volunteers coming forward. Many of our volunteers have been with the CML from the start and are now, understandably, beginning to think of reducing their commitments, although as mentioned above, none seem to intend to use the Corona stoppage as an end point for their

own involvement. It has also been difficult to identify people who are prepared to take over the responsibility of the day to day management of the library and café from those established in the posts for some time. We had put forward the idea of a Volunteers' Fair to be held in the Village Hall as a way of recruiting more, and letting the newcomers know of all the activities that go on in the village. This is on hold for the time being.

Learning

As mentioned above, we have been and are very willing to continue to act as a resource for other CMLs to learn from our experience. We also rely on the continuing back up and support of the County Council library service, although the important Lockdown decisions have had to be taken on an individual CML basis. We therefore were following national government guidelines, along with information from the CML Network. A strong backup of involved 'grass roots' support is highly desirable.

Information and Contacts

We are fortunate to rely on a wide range of skills from within the community. We have also exchanged views with the local CML forum which has had an annual meeting organised by the council and made individual visits to other libraries.

For the Repair Shop and Library of Things developments we have been in contact and visited SHARE Oxford (<https://shareoxford.org>) and referred to the website www.repairshop.org

Janice Montague, Volunteer Library Lead
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Jesmond Library

Newcastle upon Tyne

Introduction

Jesmond Library is a Community Managed Library and Community Hub.

The building is leased by the Friends of Jesmond Library from Newcastle City Council. Friends of Jesmond Library is a company limited by guarantee (number 08430250) and a Registered Charity (in England and Wales, 1151935). Its address is Jesmond Library, St George's Terrace, Jesmond, Newcastle upon Tyne NE2 2DL.

Context

Jesmond is a relatively affluent suburb of Newcastle upon Tyne, with primarily Victorian housing, situated only about 2 miles from the City Centre. The local population includes a significant number of students and staff from the city's two universities, professionals from local government and the health service, elderly residents of a number of specialist

homes and grouped residences, retired people and families. The library is situated on the edge of Jesmond's main local shopping centre (Acorn Road), close to a Metro Station (West Jesmond) and to Jesmond Pool and Gym (another community enterprise).

As part of a round of major budget cuts in late 2012 the City Council announced the proposed closure of Jesmond and a number of other public libraries. About 100 people attended a packed public meeting on 4 December, with 93 attendees opposing the closure of Jesmond Library and 3 supporting it. The meeting agreed to establish a Working Group of residents both to oppose the closure, but also, should the Council press on with its plans, to consider establishing a community-run vehicle to re-open it. After consideration of a number of options, including asking the community enterprise running the swimming pool to take over the library as well, the working group decided to establish an independent charitable company, the Friends of

Jesmond Library. The Council subsequently decided that the library would close on June 30 (shortly after the building celebrated 50 years since its official opening) but also to negotiate a lease of the building to the Friends, with a view to enabling them to reopen it as a community-run operation. After consulting with residents, drawing up a business plan, fundraising, recruiting and training volunteers, and holding several trial openings in August, the Friends re-opened the library on 21 September 2013.

Jesmond Library

Before the 2020 lockdown Jesmond Library was open for three days a week as a normal public library, with just over 10,000 books, newspapers and a seating area, a popular children's area, coffee machine, People's Network public access computers, a photocopier and two well-used community meeting rooms. Room bookings and events organised in the community rooms and main library space took place both during normal library hours, and usually in the evenings and on the other four days a week as well. No paid staff are employed; we currently have about 85 volunteers.

Jesmond Library is housed in a much loved Grade Two Listed Building, designed as a public library in the 1960's, with a distinctive round main library room, almost completely surrounded by floor to ceiling windows. Most of the bookshelves and other furniture can readily be moved, making the room an excellent venue for public meetings, concerts and plays.

The library operates independently from the local authority, from which it receives no ongoing revenue funding, and is not part of the statutory library network. Nevertheless, the Friends have had significant advice and help from a number of council officers and councillors, and choose to pay for the council to maintain various building maintenance services.

When the library re-opened under community management the council donated most of the book stock and furniture to us. The Friends now spend about £4,000 a year on purchasing new (and some second hand) books, as recommended by a book buying group of library users. Donated books are only accepted if they are in priority categories, such as modern novels or good quality children's books. The older books are regularly "weeded", to remove books which are not being borrowed or look damaged. Having been disconnected from the

council's Library Management System, the Friends now use Eclipse.

The Friends cover normal running costs from a variety of sources, with the largest contributions coming from regular voluntary monthly or annual donations from supporters, room hire, and events organised by volunteers. Extra fundraising, such as grants and special appeals, is used to fund capital improvements to the building.

The Friends hold the building on a 20 year lease from the council. The council is responsible for keeping the roof in good repair, but otherwise the friends are responsible for all building maintenance, repairs and running costs.

Covid-19

During the coronavirus crisis the continuing regular donations from library supporters have proved even more important than usual, as nearly all other income stopped, with the exception of one of the government's very welcome grants to small businesses. Together with financial reserves this will keep the library solvent throughout a phased reopening period, until (hopefully) normal service is resumed.

As at September 2020 the library is open on a limited basis, for two hours on three days a week, to receive and lend out books, and for access to the public use computers. The number of customers accessing the building at any one time is strictly limited, and procedures for extra cleaning, social distancing and quarantining of returned books are in place. No events are taking place and there are no newspapers or refreshments which might tempt customers to linger.

Jesmond Library as a Community Hub

Impact and outcomes

Although Jesmond is very well supplied with churches and church halls, cafes, pubs and restaurants, it does not have a single, secular, community centre, making the library an excellent "neutral" venue for many community activities and meetings (when these are able to resume). Access to the university libraries and the City Library (in the city centre) is not difficult for specialist purposes, and for readily mobile residents, but Jesmond Library is greatly valued by older residents, parents with young children, and many other local residents. The People's Network computers (still run by the

city council) are heavily used by local residents with limited access to IT facilities, including people needing to print items from their own lap-tops or tablets.

In the 12 months 1 April 2019 – 31 March 2020 there were over 960 events or room bookings. Events taking place in the library included councillors' ward surgeries, consultation meetings organised by the council and others, language classes and conversation groups, current affairs discussions, drama, music, adult education organised by the WEA, monthly morning/lunch events for older people, storytime for young children and their carers, children's crafts, and weekly Thursday evening talks, covering a huge range of topics. Several newly forming groups have held their first meetings in the library, including the Jesmond Dementia Action Alliance and Keep Jesmond Clean.

Learning

It would not be possible to fund the public library operation without regular income from donations from local residents, and events and room hire. The library activities and other events are mutually beneficial, combining to create a busy and friendly atmosphere which is much appreciated by volunteers and library users. An independent, community-managed library can react quickly to customer views and the suggestions made by volunteers, and benefits from the involvement of volunteers with a wide range of skills and interests.

All community libraries are different, and some things which have worked in Jesmond may well not work elsewhere. In terms of generating support from our local community (both financial and offers of volunteers) it was important that everyone realised that Jesmond Library would definitely close if local support did not materialise. Indeed it did close for a few months after the council ceased to operate it themselves, so it was clear when it reopened that there was a new way of working.

Drawing on a full range of skills from the local community has also been vital: besides volunteers keen and knowledgeable on books and libraries, we have needed legal help, building maintenance volunteers, newsletter and poster experts, IT advice and much more. As well as local residents, some local businesses have been very helpful, seeing a local library as an important component of a flourishing locality. And other local community organisations have also been helpful, whether by helping to "spread the word", using the library as a venue, or encouraging their members to volunteer.

Networking is extremely important. In the early days of the Friends of Jesmond Library the Working Group sought advice from other pre-existing community libraries, from relevant council staff and councillors, and from the operators of the nearby community swimming pool.

A further lesson of the COVID crisis has been that any community organisation needs a level of financial reserves to survive unexpected challenges, but that on the other hand the absence of all the problems of employing paid staff has ironically made it easier to reduce outgoings quickly, and to respond quickly and flexibly to events.

Information and Contacts

Chris Clarke, Company Secretary and Treasurer,
chrisclarkenewbrough@gmail.com

All general enquiries to
enquiries@jesmondlibrary.org

Useful resources

Annual Reports; Volunteer Handbook; original Draft Business Plan; advice to volunteers involved in the "Book Collect, Return and Delivery" service which was been running during the coronavirus lockdown.

Website and Social Media links:

www.jesmondlibrary.org

www.facebook.com/JesmondLibrary

Upper Norwood Library Hub (UNLH) Crystal Palace



Introduction

In 2012 local residents in Crystal Palace formed the Upper Norwood Library Trust (UNLT) to take over the operation, governance and management of the Upper Norwood Joint Library (UNJL) under threat of closure due to funding reductions. UNJL was, uniquely, an independent library supported and jointly funded for the previous 112 years by a Joint Library Committee of elected members from Lambeth and Croydon borough councils, and local community representatives. Independent status allows for a responsive and flexible approach to service delivery.

UNLT negotiated a viable model for continuation of library services to the local community with the addition of other valuable community services with Lambeth and Croydon Councils. In 2016, the Trust established the Upper Norwood Library Hub (UNLH) and recruited two joint Hub Directors to set up and develop the organisation. Lambeth and Croydon Councils fund 35 hours librarian support, they offered 2 years funding extended to 2020 albeit significantly reduced to get the organisation off to a positive start. UNLT trustees provide strategic steer and direction for UNLH. The directors of UNLH and their team manage day to day operations and strive towards building a viable and sustainable

business model and a Library fit for the 21st Century.

The Hub directors are peer brokers on the Power to Change (PTC) Peer brokerage programme and one is a PTC Community Business Panel member. UNLH, together with Locality, Libraries Connected and the Libraries Taskforce developed the Community Managed Libraries National Peer Network in 2017. Now a charity in its own right, it has 8 trustees from across a range of community libraries plus Libraries Connected. The wider board includes an Arts Council representative and a solicitor.

Context

Crystal Palace sits on top of a hill, it is where five south London boroughs — Bromley, Croydon, Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark — meet. Crystal Palace is named after the great steel and glass structure that was moved to Sydenham Hill from Hyde Park, from the site of the Great Exhibition of 1851, before it burned down in 1936 in a fire that was seen for miles around. The heart of Crystal Palace is centred on a triangle of one-way streets with a number of independent shops, cafés and restaurants.

Population figures for our areas of benefit: Crystal Palace and Upper Norwood (pop. 16,826) and the immediate surrounding areas of Knights Hill (pop. 13,687), Gipsy Hill (pop. 13,712), Thornton Heath (pop. 16,539), Sydenham (pop. 15,605), South Norwood (pop. 16,518), Penge and Anerley (pop. 17,326) - 2011 Census. Pre-Covid 19 around 19,000 people used our space, we also have 4.8 FTE staff, 15 regular volunteers, 6 trustees and 35 Supporters in the new membership programme all local residents.

UNLH beneficiaries are often removed from the heart of decision making i.e. town halls and much needed public services and to reach/access them they may need to take 2 or 3 buses from their homes or dial-a-ride. We offer a range of wellbeing, performance arts, enterprise and learning services to local residents.

About the library services

UNLH has great support from Lambeth and Croydon Councils. Since 2016, Lambeth Library Services have run the library services in the building, co-funded by Croydon Council.

Pre-Covid 19, the building was open six days a week, apart from Mondays from 10.00am to 6.00pm on Tuesdays to Saturdays, then from 11.00am to 5.00pm on Sundays. There is a librarian in the building when it is open, and after they leave at 5.00pm, self-service is available. Pre-Covid 19, there were 6,885 book issues.

Due to Covid-19, the building and the library services closed in March 2020. We re-opened in August 2020 after making the building Covid-19 secure and implementing risk assessments and training for staff. The building is now open three days a week and for shorter hours.

To use the library services, residents can call or email the library to make an appointment to use a computer or collect pre-selected books from the catalogue. There is the option for one of the team of expert librarians to select items for residents based on their personal tastes. An appointment is not needed to return items to any branches.

UNLH as a Community Hub

UNLH strives to become a modern centre for lifelong opportunity and possibility. Today, in addition to the library services, UNLH offer a range of performance arts programmes, a community bar and café, the first Library of Things in a library in the UK, learning, wellbeing and enterprise initiatives. UNLH established a successful livestream service as a result of Covid-19 and transferred a number of vital local services such as yoga, mindfulness, digital inclusion online, including a lunch time show.

UNLH hosts a number of activities throughout the week, Monday to Sunday, before the start of the day, during library opening hours and in the evenings. Our building is particularly busy during the weekends and in the evenings.

UNLH's vision is to be a centre for lifelong opportunity and possibility. Everything we do is geared towards making us a central hub for local residents to access services they need and want. As part of this, we have been working very hard to become self-sustainable so we can protect and assure the future of the library service, the building and all the other services we provide. Pre-Covid 19 nearly 50% of overall income was earned from trading activities driven by a diversified business model.



Live music in the library

Leaf Bar and Cafe

Sweating our asset through space, equipment and car park hire; bar and café, library hub shop, holiday camps, performance arts and entertainment such as comedy, theatre, regular music, exhibitions, festivals, box office events as well as those delivered by local residents and VCSEs in our space.

Distributed delivery model achieved through collaborations and partnership working with over 30 different local and national organisations, with local residents and volunteers. They include digital inclusion in partnership with ClearCommunity Web, IMTuition services which provide affordable tuition for local residents, Counselling services in partnership with St Christopher's Hospice, Big Fish, Little Fish, Creative Writing and more.

We partner with, co-create services and support local residents to deliver services from our space, such as Little Brushstrokes - a holiday art camp for children, live drawing classes, Sound Bath, T'ai Chi, yoga, mindfulness, table tennis club, our first and most successful Affordable Arts Fair designed and delivered in partnership with a range of local artists, West End in the Library, until recently a Sewing school, affordable markets and more.

Some of our services are delivered entirely by volunteers, notably our English-Speaking classes. The facilitators are experienced professionals, often supported by Volunteer Reading Helpers who provide additional speaking and reading support where needed. Digital inclusion is also supported by local volunteers who visit or offer one to one online support to seniors and vulnerable adults.

Trusts and Foundations who offer grants and project funding to support our learning, wellbeing

and enterprise initiatives such as Cycle Confident delivered in partnership with Bromley and Croydon's Women's Aid to support families who experience domestic abuse, Energy advice for the most vulnerable in our community and more.

Library Without Walls (LWW) under which we innovate, think outside of the box and scale up activities often piloted with support from statutory bodies, supporters, volunteers, grant giving bodies such as Power to Change, Arts Philanthropy Trust, Mayors Fund, the Arts Council, Awards for All, Croydon Council, and others.

Our very successful live stream services and soon to be podcasts, the community managed libraries peer network, Attic Arts Club in partnership with Disentangle Projects, Crystal Palace Library of Things in partnership with Library of Things and Crystal Palace Transition Town, Tea and Tech, our consultancy services and others fall under LWW.

Future Development

Due to Covid-19 all our large-scale events and activities and the bar/café which supported these activities are on hold.

We now host very small-scale activities, all of which follow govt safety and social distancing measures. Our livestream service on Facebook, with videos on YouTube continue, and we are looking at ways to develop and sustain this service.

Though Covid-19 has made it impossible for us to achieve the same income levels as before, it has also presented some new opportunities. Some will need to be researched and potentially new partners identified to make them a reality. Power to Change funding is helping to re-purpose some existing services and delivery models.

We conducted some research with support from the Arts Council and our community have identified other services they would like to see in our space. Some of these will enable us to respond to community needs when there are future spikes in the virus.

To ensure our future as an organisation we need to:

- think and operate beyond the physical
- intensify and develop more Library without Walls initiatives
- build our digital capacity and presence

- explore new partnerships, social engagement, marketing and outreach activities.

Our world as we knew it is no longer the same, new threats as well as opportunities face organisations such as ours, and we need to be ready and strategically placed to respond to the challenges to assure our future viability.

Challenges and solutions

Covid-19 has presented us with a number of challenges:

We are unable to use the building for the large-scale activities and events and struggle to achieve the same income levels as before. With more predicted corona virus spikes, we face a great deal of uncertainty and do not know when we can use the building to its full capacity. We work with a number of performance artists many of whom struggle to find work.

- We plan to develop the livestream service and to do more digitally focused activities. We will also explore the possibility of a subscription service. The livestream service gives the artists we work with a platform to showcase their talent, and an opportunity to earn income, with support from the Arts Council and other funders.
- Our statutory funding from the councils ends in 2020, and with all statutory bodies facing major financial challenges, this will leave a massive gap in our income. We will continue discussions with the councils as well as exploring other funding opportunities to support the organisation.
- Some of our volunteers continue to shield and may not be able to return to the building in the future. We maintain contact and communication with them, and though they are confined to their homes, some support the livestream service, others join the online digital inclusion classes. When the government's job retention scheme ends, this could have implication for staffing. We will continue to source new grant opportunities for project activities which can be led by staff.

Other challenges we face are mainly around our communication and marketing. We have brought in an expert to train our core staff and help us develop a strong marketing and communication strategy but also get more clarity around our brand. We have also engaged a social media expert who is working alongside the team to help us improve our presence

online, particularly as we run a livestream service.

Learning

We started our journey to become a community hub in 2016. Some of the services and activities we introduced as part of this were not always successful, but we learnt from them. Those that were successful were scaled up and they continue to generate income for us such as the performance arts events.

We strive to be an open and inclusive organisation which has helped us to build a number of interesting and long-lasting relationships locally and nationally.

We always put the needs and wants of our communities at the heart of what we do.

Most of our services are user or community led, they therefore attract interest and custom from the community.

We describe ourselves as a library of possibilities or a library without boundaries, this has allowed us to trial and implement activities not often seen in a library setting, eg a community bar, Library of Things and our space transforms into a theatre and musical venue after hours and at weekends.

Partnership working and clear communication are key to achieving a successful community hub. Because we collaborate with a number of organisations and residents, we can pool our resources, knowledge and energies together to provide services our community need.

A good relationship with the councils and funders is also important. Their insights, funding and support enable us to run a successful community space for all.

Radical listening through research, community engagement and regular dialogue with our users, residents, businesses and other VCSEs ensure the services we provide remain relevant and appropriate for our community.

Next Steps for UNLH

A community hub should not be viewed as static nor should the services or activities we provide be seen as only available within a physical space. A number of the services we offer from our space can be delivered digitally or outside the walls of the building, some can be delivered with partners, some of whom are already set up or have the resources to work with us.

As our world continues to change, and with the pandemic still raw in our lives, we need to work smarter and differently. This means re-purposing our business, service delivery and funding models so we can confidently respond to growing external pressures, the changing needs of our community and sustain the organisation.

Diversity is so important in this brave new world. Our success and survival will depend on how we mainstream diversity into planning, our thinking and decision making; into our delivery models, partnerships, use of technology, supporters, users and more. A more diverse approach will extend our reach into new audiences, markets and opportunities.

Innovation is another we must embrace and ensure it permeates everything we do now.

People want social contact, they want to communicate and share with others, and it is important that any new activities we implement, particularly virtually, enable people to maintain and build those valued relationships and contacts.

Information and Contacts

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Twitter: www.twitter.com/UpperNorLibHub

Whitburn Community Library South Tyneside



Introduction

The Friends of Whitburn Library (FoWL) took over the library in early 2019, it is volunteer run. The footfall in the library was low and very early on it was decided by the trustees to try and make the library a community hub, a unifying presence in Whitburn. The trustees attempted to look at what people want from a community hub and not simply a library. They wanted to promote the library for the benefit of the residents of Whitburn and the local area with the provision of facilities for recreation or other leisure time activities. The library is quite small but has an 'intimate' feel to it and has rooms which can be used to provide services that the village can use.

The Friends group looked at the library becoming a hub that engendered a feeling of belonging. To this end FoWL consulted the community.

The outcome showed that the library needs to

- Be in a central location
- Be accessible
- Provide a meeting space
- Meet the needs of vulnerable people
- Provide access to education for all ages

- Provide targeted support services, ie in order to be dementia friendly
- Promote the heritage of the village

There was some progress responding to the consultation however the Covid pandemic halted this.

Context

Whitburn is a coastal village with around 6000 residents in South Tyneside between South Shields and Sunderland. Whitburn Community Library serves the village of Whitburn and the outskirts of South Shields and Seaburn.

Whitburn Library was handed over the Friends of Whitburn Library (FoWL) in 2019 by South Tyneside Council, following a public consultation that commenced in 2017. The Council wanted to condense the library service into four main hubs, closing the local library, leaving Whitburn village some three miles from the nearest planned hub.

The local authority supply and insure the book stock but FoWL is responsible for contents and building insurance, utilities and general maintenance. The library management system (LMS) is a limited version of South Tyneside's LMS, enabling FoWL to issue, return and reserve stock, and access the online catalogue without access to users details apart from their name and ticket number.

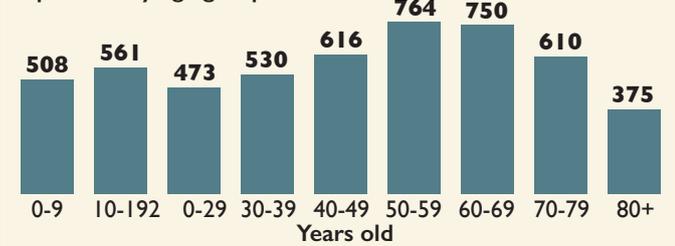
FoWL have a grant from the Council for three years, decreasing each year.

Whitburn has an ageing demographic reflected in a large proportion of our users. There are two primary and one senior school serving the village. The senior schools serves several villages which have their own libraries. We find it difficult to attract parents and children to our baby/toddler activities - this may be because we are on the border of South Tyneside and Sunderland so there is a lot of competition from other groups in the area. The library is rarely used by children over primary school age.

About the library services

The library is in a purpose-built building dating from the 1960s, extended in the 1990s. FoWL have a 40 year lease on the building at a peppercorn rent. The library is entirely volunteer run and open twenty-four hours a week and most of volunteers are over sixty years old.

Population by age group 2011



Our issues are approx. 9,000 per year with approx. 850 registered members. We have four computers available for public use with printing and photocopying facilities.

Light refreshments are also available for purchase – tea, coffee, juice and biscuits

The library is situated in the centre of the village on the main road between Sunderland and South Shields. It is set back slightly within its own grassed area and surrounded by cottages and bungalows mainly occupied by the elderly. A new retirement complex is being built to the rear of the library.

Whitburn as a Community Hub

When FoWL took over the library there were already a few established groups – 3 book clubs, knitting group, computer help with Age Concern Tyneside South and Leonard Cheshire Foundation, and a struggling baby bounce/story time. Pre Covid-19 the range expanded to include – a community cinema, West African drumming with WEA, French conversation, BSL and bridge groups. There is a fortnightly quiz evening which alternates with an evening talk and or slideshow, as well as an occasional wine tasting evening and a weekly music group as well as the local councillors' surgeries.

The library was chosen as the ideal position to have the emergency defibrillator installed, a venture funded by the local Church.

Pupils from the senior school who are working towards their Duke of Edinburgh Awards now volunteer for an hour per week after school as part of their Community work.

FoWL also run a range of community activities which all use the meeting room which is attached to the library

Knitting group - a group of 6 -8 ladies who meet weekly for 2 hours and carry out knitting/crochet projects. They produce items for the library – nursery rhyme characters for the children's library and at Easter and Christmas various things to sell

for library funds. These include chocolate orange covers and ducks hiding a crème egg which were sold at a cost of £2.00. We also run a small group that meets weekly to continue the local tradition of proggy mat and hooky mat making. £2 per person

Wriggle, Jiggle, Story time - Rhymes and stories for 0-3 years old, unfortunately this is not as well attended as we would like. It is free to use.

BSL, French conversation and Bridge - three recently formed groups which were just getting established before lockdown. The cost is £2.00 per person. They are run by supporters of the library who volunteer their time.

Computer tuition - conducted by Age Concern Tyneside South (ACTS) and Leonard Cheshire Foundation. Mainly for the elderly – how to use emails, safe online shopping etc. Free.

Reading groups - we have three monthly reading groups. Each group has about eight members, the books are supplied by South Tyneside and rotated regularly with other reading groups within the authority. The choice of books is made by the Community librarian at South Shields library. The cost of this group is £2.00 per person per visit

Quiz night — this is held fortnightly with the quiz being set by the quizmaster for that week. We have a pool of volunteers who have offered to act as quizmaster. The charge is £2 per head, some people come as a team but others as individuals who join with other non-team members for the evening. There is a bingo round halfway through at £1.00. Refreshments are also available. Prize money for both the quiz and bingo is a proportion of the takings for that evening.

Talks - These are held on alternate weeks to the quiz night, there is a volunteer who holds a list of speakers and then contacts them to draw up a calendar of talks at a cost of £2.00 per person.

Wine tasting evening - held every six weeks at £10.00 per person. A volunteer who is knowledgeable about wines purchases a selection of six different wines around a theme of his choice from one of the local supermarkets. This is a very popular evening and always a sell-out but does require the appropriate licenses from the Local Authority.

African Drumming - WEA class that was due to start a second term but lockdown prevented this. The library space was hired on a day when the

library was closed. The fees for the course go to WEA but they pay a fee for hiring the area.

Community cinema - The library invested in an HD data projector and started a community cinema showing movies. The cinema was starting to become quite popular before the pandemic lock down. The cinema showed monthly films at a cost of £3.00 per person. The appropriate licenses were obtained to allow us to show films on DVD and to serve refreshments during showings

Future Development

The main focus for the future must be improving the Community hub aspect of the Library. The pandemic has closed all of the community aspects which are only now being set up again. The library has started with some simple ideas.

Local Interest: the local interest area of the library was dull and boring so the area has been revamped - putting local pictures on the back of the shelves and arranging the books in order of area for example South Shields, Sunderland and the Wear.

Local interest wall: 'The Whitburn Gallery'. FoWL has cleared a space above the shelves to enable work of local interest by people attached to the library to be displayed. We displayed a poster around the local area asking for work and have already a selection of paintings and photos by local people of the local area.

A dementia friendly library: Whitburn is demographically an ageing population and so there is a system in the Library which allows movies/ videos or slide shows to be shown when the library is open containing pictures of local interest. These are designed to be talking points - old shops and places long gone. There used to be a train service from South Shields to Whitburn and a slide show of its journey is being produced. This will include old and new photos of the journey. Volunteers will be encouraged to attain the "Dementia Friendly" award from the Alzheimer's society. The long-term goal is for Whitburn, as a village to achieve the "Dementia Community Accolade"

A cosy corner - it is planned to have an area in the library where it will be possible to work and research. The area will have a table with decoupage of local interests.

The Village notice board: A notice board has been built near the nearby bus shelter which can be used by villagers as well as the library to advertise,

and, in the spirit of reawakening the artistic heritage of the village, it can contain each week a piece of literature, a poem perhaps, or a small piece of local environmental or historical interest.

A quarterly flyer: includes articles of local interest, but also provide a platform to show off local artistic and literary talent will be set up. It may profit from local advertising.

An evening music group has been set up and will continue once the circumstances improve and will allow local people to meet and play and discuss music

When the Community Cinema restarts it will build the success they achieved prior to the lockdown. It will continue to show films of interest to the locals. E.g. A life for Ruth which was partially set in the locally demolished village of Marsden.

Age UK IT tutor will again be starting lessons for the older on using an iPad. These were popular and will continue to be well attended.

Children's Library: the children's library has been revamped and is being made into a more friendly area. It is still open but has a more enclosed feel to it.

Family history: There will be a course on family history. Ancestry.co.uk, Find My Past and British Newspaper Archive are available on the library computers.

Challenges and solutions

Reaching out to our users: publicity is a major problem – we distribute posters of events to the local shops, surgery, use social media and produce a calendar of activities for the forthcoming month.

As a lot of our users are elderly, they are not always confident with social media and computers so we have to rely on posters and word of mouth and a notice board in the library grounds, next to the bus stop. Before the library suggested this there was no central notice board in the village. Any organisation within Whitburn can use this facility.

Volunteers - we have been quite lucky in the way that the number of volunteers prepared to work for the library has been reasonable stable.

Offering work in the library for an hour per week after school to local pupils undertaking their Duke of Edinburgh Award community service has proved popular.

Consistency: it is important to us that the service that the customers get is consistent. We try to

keep this by having a day book with comment and a weekly email with the rota and any useful comments or requests.

Covid-19: the pandemic has allowed us to put effort into rearranging areas in the library to make them more user friendly. The children's library being made into more open space and being child friendly and the local history area being rearranged into the local interest area and the area being made easier to use. The pandemic has forced us to stop the sale of refreshments and this can only restart when the situation improves.

The wi-fi system is not good enough and if used causes the whole IT infrastructure to slow to an unacceptable rate. This issue is caused by the broadband supplier and is being looked at for improvement in the future.

Craft activities in the half term and other school holidays usually have half a dozen children each day but several of the children do not return to use the library on a regular basis. The Summer Reading Challenge is initially well supported but once the children have their introductory pack there is a lack of enthusiasm to continue – we still have uncollected certificates and medals from last year!

Involving the community in moving the service forward is hard work – there is not a lot of response to questionnaires etc.

Also due to the age of our customers many of them do not leave home during the evening and so some fundraising and community activities have to be put on during the day.

Donated books: the library gets a lot of books donated. The local authority does not allow us to add them to Soprano. We have had to research an additional method of recording them. It looks likely that we will choose the iOS and Android app CLZ

books. This will also allow us to have an iPad on a stand so that customers can easily see what books we have in stock. We will have to manually issue books which means that the database will not show whether the books are in stock but has the massive advantage of allowing us to know what donated books we have.

Learning

Charitable status helps a lot. It allows us to apply for grants and other funding. It has enabled us to purchase equipment such as buying our PPE from a Charity buying Group

Having access to someone who is experienced in completing grant applications is a bonus. Keep your eyes open for local grants – South Tyneside awards money from their Community Action Fund and so far, we have successfully applied for funding to set up a light refreshment area (filter coffee machine, mugs, supplies, cleaning materials etc.), and funding for a Christmas party for some of our users.

A wide range of age groups on the management committee would be useful to bring freshness and a new view of what people want from their library/ community hub.

Next steps for Whitburn

- **The main entrance**
The condition of the main entrance has deteriorated over the past 18 months since the FOWL took over. It has been decided by the trustees to revamp the entrance. This will be achieved by removing the roller shutter, which is no longer required enhancing the main entrance to the library.
- **Outside area**
The library is set in a grassed area which needs to be made more inviting to make better use of the grounds. Ideas include outside seating – may be cream tea event in the summer, community garden with pots/troughs of herbs etc.
- There is little seating away from the road in the centre of the village and the area to the side of the library may provide this.

Information and Contacts

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