

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, YOUTH, FAMILIES AND CULTURE

THE IMPACT OF NOTTINGHAMSHIRE LIBRARY SERVICES

Purpose of the Report

1. To inform Members of the results of research into the impact of Nottinghamshire Library Services upon library users.

Information and Advice

2. Nottinghamshire Libraries carried out a series of focus groups with different groups of library users. The focus groups were held across the County and engaged with users about different aspects of the library service.
3. The aim was to explore how public library services make a difference to - and impact upon - the lives of users, and to what extent the service meets its aims and objectives outlined in the Library Strategy. Customer feedback, performance statistics and the results of the service's Public Library User Survey (PLUS) were also referred to in order to further explore the impact of our services.
4. Focus groups were held with the following groups at the locations shown:

Reading group members	Retford
Young people	Worksop
Visitors to the Southwell Library Poetry Festival	Southwell
Visually Impaired Reading Group members	Mansfield
Parents of under 5s	Mansfield
People who study or use the library for extended periods	Beeston
People with learning disabilities	Worksop
Computer users	Arnold
Local studies and family history users	Newark
Staff from across the service	

The impact of library services upon their users

5. The County Council's *A Strategy for Nottinghamshire's Libraries* clearly sets out the aims of the service, which is to:

Be at the heart of Nottinghamshire communities and community life.

6. To achieve this, we will:
- Inspire the enjoyment of books and reading
 - Create knowledge through access to learning, information and local heritage
 - Stimulate and encourage cultural activities
 - Offer excellent and inclusive customer service for all every time.
7. The results of the focus groups and further research demonstrated the extent to which the service achieves each of its aims and objectives. This can be summarised as follows:

Aim: To be at the heart of Nottinghamshire communities and community life:

8. A key factor to come out of the research was just how much our customers value their libraries as a shared, public space, where all members of the community are welcome to come together.

“Libraries are unique. There is no where else to find that public space.” (Library customer)

9. A number of users referred to the effect the library had on combating their loneliness and isolation.

“I took early retirement last year. I didn’t know anyone in the area, but it is now nice to recognise faces and people when out and about.” (Library customer)

10. The following experiences of staff members also seek to illustrate this role:

“We have a lady who recently moved into the area to be near her daughter. She was quite lonely while [she was] at work. So she came to one of our coffee mornings. She commented that: ‘the library had saved my life, I wasn’t going anywhere but I now have a group of friends, and if it was not for the coffee mornings I would probably have been very ill.’”

“We have an elderly gentleman who comes into one of our libraries every Saturday to read the newspaper. He loves the library because it’s warm (he can turn his heating off at home), read the paper for free, and talk to people (he doesn’t have visitors at home). The library provides what he is missing in his home life.”

11. Having free or low cost events in our libraries can have a positive effect not only on individuals, but also on community life as whole – enabling it to flourish and grow.

“I think of it [the library Reading Group] as a support group. We both lost our husbands and the ladies have been a support to us. I think of us as a family.” (Library reading group customer)

“I came to the poetry festival for the first time shortly after I moved here...that’s what I take away from it – it’s that sense of community.” (Poetry Festival attendee)

“It’s...[integrated] me more into the community, I’ve not really been part of the... community before.” (Poetry Festival attendee)

12. For people who are not in work, libraries offer access to a warm environment, which gives people who are used to the structure and companionship of a working day a chance to interact with others; to get out of their house; to access computers for free, to learn new skills, access a wide range of resources and information and apply for jobs.

“I use the computers because it focuses my mind here [in the library]. It gets me into the habit of getting out and doing something. (Customer, Arnold Library)

13. Investment in our buildings through the development of our strategic libraries at Worksop, Mansfield and West Bridgford increases the impact that libraries and their services have.

“Can I just say how brilliant a resource the library is in Worksop – I came in to renew some books a week ago and was thrilled to see how many families were using it and what great events you have planned. Lots of people we know are talking about what a real gem it is for the Worksop area – no dusty old whispering places in sight and the staff are excellent, plus it’s such a contemporary building which makes people think their town is a bit more ‘cool’ than it used to be. Buildings such as this really raise aspirations.” (Worksop Library customer)

14. Comparing performance figures pre and post refurbishment for a library such as Mansfield demonstrates the effect of this development: Mansfield saw a 73% increase of items loaned between 2010 and 2012; a 30% increase in visitors and a 110% increase in new members.

Aim: Inspire the enjoyment of books and reading

15. Nottinghamshire Libraries provides a wide range of reading related activities, from the annual Southwell Library Poetry Festival and Readers’ Day to regular reading cafes, children’s Rhyme, Rattle and Roll events, poetry walks, crime cafes, reading prize events, reading chains, author events and Chatterbooks groups for younger readers.

16. These events offer an opportunity for people to share their reading experience, to develop reading from being an isolated activity to a shared experience, and to find new authors, poets and books to enjoy:

“[I have] read books that I would never think of reading”

“[It is] very important to mix with people who have different views”

“[It] takes you out of your comfort zone”

(Reading group members, Retford)

17. The service provides a wide range of reading development work with children and young people to encourage the enjoyment of books and reading. This starts with the library service working with babies through the national Bookstart scheme, where the library service ensures that 100% of babies receive a Bookstart pack including free books, and an invitation to join the library service.

18. Our research found that Nottinghamshire residents valued the provision of this scheme and recognised the importance for their child's development.

“Bookstart has supplied my grandchildren with lots of new books and activities. They are learning to read and are advancing quickly.”

“Books enhance a child's start in life. Bookstart reinforces that from the beginning. The free books my child has received are wonderful.”

“We all love the library and Bookstart – without it my girls would not read anything like as much!”

(Bookstart service users)

19. Nottinghamshire Libraries provide free Rhyme, Rattle and Roll sessions of rhymes and songs for babies, plus Story Hullabaloo sessions for toddlers and pre-schoolers, with the aim of developing a love of reading and books from an early age, improving literacy development, and providing preparation for the school environment. Studies demonstrate that the better children are at detecting rhyme the better and quicker they are at learning to read – regardless of their social class, general intelligence or memory ability.¹
20. A focus group on the delivery of these sessions at one Nottinghamshire library illustrated the real experience of local parents, who valued these sessions and the impact they can have on their child's early development:

“My daughter recognises the songs now. She starts nursery in January so I'm thinking it's getting her used to sitting down without it being too strict.”

“I've seen a big difference. We came to the very first session and she was all over the place. Now she sits and takes part and it brings them on.”

“Nice to get to know the songs, because I don't know many songs.”

“This group gave us the motivation to get up in the mornings.”

“My son reads the reading books and he is now way ahead of his classmates in school for his reading level. He's been to the library from 6 months old.”

(Parents of under 5s at Mansfield Library)

Annually, Nottinghamshire Libraries attracts over 30,000 attendances at its under 5 activities.

21. The library service delivers a varied and vibrant programme of special events delivered and hosted by the service to inspire a love of reading for pleasure in children, with the aim to make a real contribution to stimulating children's imaginations and creating enthusiasm for reading. These events have included exciting guest appearances from

¹ <http://www.bookstart.org.uk/professionals/about-bookstart-and-the-packs/research/reviews-and-resources/the-benefit-of-rhymes/> Accessed 17/10/2013

book characters, such as the Gruffalo, attended by hundreds of children and parents, to inspire and excite children with books and reading.

22. Parents value these events and recognise their importance to their children's development.

"So proud of my big/little Girl – she's read 50 books in 3 weeks and has moved higher in her reading group! The Gruffalo gave her more motivation – Library again tomorrow for another 23 books." (Parent)

23. The value placed on these events by local parents in nurturing an excitement for reading is supported by national evidence which demonstrates the positive impact of child's success in life:

"Reading for pleasure has been revealed as the most important indicator of the future success of a child (OECD, 2002)²

24. The service delivers the annual Summer Reading Challenge during the school holidays for primary aged children. This encourages children to read six books over the summer - a time when children's reading ability tends to dip in the absence of reading regularly at school. In summer 2013, over 10,000 children took part in the challenge:

"A fabulous challenge to keep my children reading over the summer. Last year my 5 year old learnt to read through the challenge. This year he has flourished and read harder books. My 7 year old is now more of a bookworm!! (Parent of children aged 5 & 7)"

25. The service also provides a variety of reading activity for adults, including the annual Southwell Library Poetry Festival which enjoys a national reputation, attracts visitors from across the region and garners fantastic feedback from audiences:

"It was like an oasis in the middle of our life...a very special time...it has been enriching... I've read a lot more poetry since."

"Very, very open...to the extent that people you'd only just met would say hi at the next session"

"[My girls] were absolutely blown away by that..pottery and poetry...I just watched...[them] blossom, be more confident and writing stuff that blew me away!"

"When they gave you things to go away and read...somehow I've found poets that I'd never come across before."

"It's not always what you read, it's how I read it that's affected by the festival."

***"I was inspired to write poetry again."
(Southwell Library Poetry Festival attendees)***

² Taken from *Literacy changes Lives*, National Literacy Trust (2008)

26. Nottinghamshire Libraries supports around 150 reading groups through the provision of books and/or meeting spaces, providing the opportunity to share a love of reading for pleasure while meeting new people in an inspiring community setting. These are highly valued by local users, both for the social function they provide and the chance to try different kinds of books and develop their reading tastes.

“[I] read books that I would never think of reading.”

“If you are not used to reading on a regular basis, it gives you a challenge to make sure you have read it for the next meeting.”

“Very important to mix with people who have different views.”

“I think you read in a more analytical way.”

“I don’t see how a book group could survive without the library. My house couldn’t fit 12 people in. It would cost money for a room and the books each time.”

(Reading Group members)

Attendees of our vibrant and large network of reading groups clearly value the opportunity these groups provide in developing their love of reading for pleasure – which has also been shown to impact positively on a person’s health and well-being.³

27. Nottinghamshire Libraries also supports four reading groups for people with visual impairments at West Bridgford, Worksop, Sutton in Ashfield and Mansfield Libraries. These offer an opportunity for people with visual impairments and their friends or carers to borrow talking books or large print and enjoy the experience of sharing books with others. The groups also offer a chance to meet others with visual impairments, which is highly valued:

“I have had a stroke. It’s nice to get out and be able to do things. This is like something new for me because all the activities I used to do before my stroke I am unable to do now. This has been perfect for me.”

“I did not realise you had audio books in the library. So I was spending a lot of money to download them. It’s been a major bonus for me.”

“I like to hear other people’s views. I can’t understand sometimes how many different views on one book we actually get.”

“[If this group didn’t exist] it would stop me having a day out socially. I’d suffer greatly from that.”

(Visually Impaired Reading Group members)

³ Reading and Health Mapping Research Project Hicks, D (2003) accessed at http://readingagency.org.uk/new-thinking/newthinking-uploads/Reading_and_health_project.pdf 9th April 2013

Aim: Create knowledge through access to learning, information and local heritage.

Learning

28. Nottinghamshire Libraries provide a range of adult and family learning opportunities throughout the county. Events range from Rowdy Robots, where families can build robots together and enjoy spending time learning together, to larger events such as a farm day where we bring animals into the library to give children new experiences. Other opportunities cover a wide range of activities, from crime scene investigating to calligraphy and craft.
29. These learning focused events encourage participation, support independence and help residents to develop learning in fun and exciting ways.

“We have all enjoyed the animal fun day, and have joined the library.”

“Really great day out for the kids, young and old. Lots of activities to keep everyone entertained, and for the slightly older children... quite educational.”

“My daughter really enjoyed making a robot. I thought it was really good and I enjoyed helping her make it.”

(Family event participants)

36% of PLUS respondents said that the library had helped them with learning or studying.

30. Public access computers, with free internet access, are available in all libraries. Customers use around a quarter of a million computer sessions a year – and 20% of library visits are to use computers. This provides a valued service to our customers, including the 20% of households⁴ who have not got internet access at home. The use of computers by people seeking employment is particularly valued, bringing benefits to individual development and empowerment, and supporting community economy and capacity building.

“It’s the only place [the unemployed] can apply for jobs.”

“I’m an unemployed engineer at the moment and I can’t afford internet access. So it’s imperative to come to the library and be able to search for jobs.”

(Library users, Arnold)

31. In addition, our own staff offer help and support to people to make best use of our services through the delivery of one-to-one TRY IT sessions, which cover a range of skills development, including basic IT, family history or job searching.

⁴ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/rdit2/internet-access---households-and-individuals/2012/stb-internet-access--households-and-individuals--2012.html> Accessed 2/4/13

“A young man through our help got a job...through helping him with his CV etc. He needed help with searching for jobs, filling in forms etc – help which he didn’t get elsewhere.” (Staff member)

32. Libraries provide over a thousand IT sessions a year, with 98% of respondents rating the quality of the content as very good or good, 99% rating the staff delivery of the training as very good or good, and 96% of people saying that they are more confident in using computers after their sessions. This can have a lasting impact on people’s lives:

“We had a gentleman in his 70s come to do a TRY IT session who had never used a computer before. He learnt all the basics and then his wife died. He did not have any communication with his son who lived a long way away, and now they communicate via e-mail due to the skills he built with us.” (Staff member)

Information

33. Libraries answer a wide variety of information requests across our service points, including through our specialist enquiry service Ask Libraries. The service answers nearly half a million enquiries a year on everything ranging from how to thread a vintage singer sewing machine to whether bears, wolves and beavers existed in Sherwood Forest in the 12th Century (you may well have seen a wolf in the 12th Century in Sherwood Forest, but the last beavers disappeared from England and Wales by this time and brown bears were present in Britain until no later than 1000 AD). 26% of all library visits are to find something out.

34. By providing impartial access to information, our libraries empower people and encourage independence. This role as information provider is highly valued by Nottinghamshire residents, providing them with the tools and knowledge to take control in aspects of their own lives.

“We are next to a doctor’s surgery and often people are given a diagnosis but not much information to go with it. So they come into us to look it up. “ (Staff member)

“We had a lady...who was devastated after her dog had died. We found her some books and a website on dog bereavement. She was so grateful...as she had felt other people had not wanted to listen.” (Staff member)

“My son’s girlfriend was recently preparing for an interview at Nottingham Uni to do midwifery. As she was having difficulty finding info about current issues in midwifery on the net, I suggested she contact you. She found the websites you sent her very useful and she was able to impress her interview panel to such an extent that she was offered a place for next September. I asked her to email you her thanks but she’ll probably forget so I’m thanking you on her behalf. Part of the credit for [her] getting into Uni must go to Ask Libraries.” (Ask Libraries customer)

35. Nottinghamshire Libraries manages a database of local groups and services which enables us to provide local information to people, and provide online subscriptions to national services such as Ancestry (for family history) and Kompass (for business

information), that are expensive for individuals to access. The service sees more than 25,000 accesses to these subscription services each year.

Local Heritage

36. Nottinghamshire Libraries provides access to a wealth of local studies and family history resources, and provide training sessions to help people to access this popular area of research. Local and family history surgeries are held every month at each of our biggest libraries. Customers are very grateful for staff help in finding information:

“...you are stars!!! Wow you have finally given me the answer after several weeks of [searching]...Thanks so very much for your help.” (Library customer)

37. These popular services encourage residents to engage with their local heritage and nurture collective pride in the rich history of our County.
38. A particular success has been the introduction of an annual local history fair, which in 2013 in Mansfield saw over 800 people attend.
39. Customers were found to greatly value the fact that local history collections are held in local libraries – which ensures access to and, ownership of, the Nottinghamshire story across the County.

“It’s great to have all the information locally”

“I find a local library is a rich source of information on a local area.”

(Library users, Newark)

40. The local collections and Archives are of huge value to customers:

“Excellent service. It is essential that we have access to our past, and Nottinghamshire do an excellent job of providing it. Having used the service as a degree level student, and for family research, I have never found the service lacking.” (Customer)

Aim: Stimulate and encourage cultural activities

41. The library service delivers around 8,000 events annually. The varied and wide ranging nature of these events includes:
- art exhibitions in our library galleries
 - regular group craft activities, such as knit and natter
 - Our Library courses for people with learning difficulties
 - live jazz concerts bringing quality live music to our communities outside of city centres
 - firefighters visits, enabling critical local services to engage with their communities in fun and exciting ways
 - a variety of further cultural events such as film showings, ghost walks, music events, reading and children’s events.

42. These local events are valued highly by our customers:

“We run a knit and natter group in our library. One lady came with no previous knitting experience and learned to knit with us and she is now teaching others in the group how to knit. “ (Staff member)

“Glad this has become a regular feature” (Jazz attendee)

“An absolutely fabulous evening! So glad these jazz evenings are becoming more permanent fixture. Long may it continue” (Jazz attendee)

‘Having the artists explaining and reading their own work, putting the emphasis as they meant it to be, made it more understandable. We would in future go to events that would not normally appeal with a more open mind” (attendee at an exhibition opening at Mansfield Central Library Gallery)

43. The experience of attendees at cultural events across Nottinghamshire libraries, underlines the value of libraries in providing access to cultural activity in an inclusive environment, breaking down many of the usual barriers to arts and cultural engagement.
44. The service delivers a successful ‘HeadSpace’ young people’s group at Worksop Library. This group of young people work with library staff to develop events for young people to participate in. These have included the library service working with the youth service to deliver the Randomfest indoor young people’s festival, author visits, a photography project and a murder mystery evening. The young people also helped to buy the young people’s book stock for the new Worksop Library.

“You don’t judge people in HeadSpace. You can relax.”

“We get to arrange stuff we actually want to do. If we suggest things at school it probably wouldn’t happen, but here it happens.”

“You have to be a part of the community and talk to people you don’t usually talk to.”

“It’s not just a library anymore, it’s like a place to socialise.”

(HeadSpace users, Worksop)

Aim: Offer excellent and inclusive customer service for all every time

45. Nottinghamshire Libraries strives to provide excellent and inclusive customer service for all every time, and was recently awarded the Customer Service Excellence Award. This is particularly evidenced by the use that is made of the services by those who are vulnerable.

“We have vulnerable adults come in from adult social care every Monday. For them to be able to sit in an environment where they feel comfortable and happy to walk around and talk to the staff makes a big difference to this group and for them to feel confident is important. “

“We are based on a housing estate and the young children come to us because we are a safe warm place.”

“We have a lady with learning difficulties and she is in everyday from opening until closing. Her mum sets her quizzes to do in the library which she uses computers for. It’s a safe place for her to be.”

(Members of staff)

46. Often, staff go the extra mile to help customers:

“Once when [a regular customer] was ill and didn’t come we knew something was wrong so we gave her a call to see if she was okay. I think it was important to her to know someone cared”. (Member of staff)

47. Nottinghamshire Libraries delivers a series of workshops with adults with learning difficulties, called ‘Our Library’. These courses familiarise participants with how the library works, and how to access the services, to encourage people to use library services as independently as possible. Participants have found the courses very useful;

“It was strange when we first came to the library, but I know where things are now.”

“I like it here in the library.” (Our Library users)

Summary

48. In summary, the experience of our focus group participants illustrated in a real way, the impact a comprehensive and vibrant library service can have on the lives of individuals and the communities they belong to.
49. Libraries can empower communities by supporting individuals and groups, provide community identity as landmarks in the locality, and support community cohesion through access to a public space.
50. Our findings bring to life the established evidence of the positive role public libraries and their services can play in their localities, and how this is being realised in Nottinghamshire.

“In short, libraries enrich the lives of many people. Library use improves the life chances of individuals, in terms of education and job opportunities. Moreover, the provision of public library services helps promote social cohesion and community confidence. Public libraries are seen as community landmarks that reinforce community identity. The library can help individuals, especially older people, overcome the problems of social isolation and loneliness. (Matarasso 1997)⁵

⁵ *Impact Evaluation of Museums, archives and Libraries: available evidence Project*, Wavell et al, 2002

Other Options Considered

51. As this is a report for noting, it is not necessary to consider other options.

Statutory and Policy Implications

52. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of finance, public sector equality duty, human resources, crime and disorder, human rights, the safeguarding of children, sustainability and the environment and those using the service and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Implications for Service Users

53. This report reflects the views of some service users, who were consulted through focus groups and through the PLUS survey.

RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1) That the results of research into the impact of Nottinghamshire Library Services upon library users be noted.

Derek Higton
Service Director, Youth, Families and Culture

For any enquiries about this report please contact:

Kirsty Blyth
Team Manager, Library Service Development
T: 0115 982 9040
E: kirsty.blyth@nottscc.gov.uk

Constitutional Comments

54. As this report is for noting only, no Constitutional Comments are required.

Financial Comments (KLA 28/10/13)

55. There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

Background Papers and Published Documents

A Strategy for Nottinghamshire Libraries, Nottinghamshire County Council, December 2011.

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All.

C0310