

**REPORT OF THE TEMPORARY DEPUTY DIRECTOR, CHILDREN, FAMILIES  
& CULTURAL SERVICES****SERVICE UPDATE FOR THE PERIOD 15 DECEMBER 2014 TO 8 FEBRUARY  
2015****Purpose of the Report**

1. To update the Committee on a range of initiatives being undertaken to improve and enhance the quality of life for Nottinghamshire people.

**Information and Advice****LIBRARIES, ARCHIVES, ARTS, INFORMATION AND COMMUNITY LEARNING****National Libraries Day**

2. A national celebration of libraries and the events and services libraries offer took place on Saturday 7 February. In Nottinghamshire there was a variety of exciting events happening all over the County in the week leading up to National Libraries Day as well as on the day itself. Highlights included Harry Potter Night; The Babbling Vagabonds; Johnny and the Raindrops performing a music gig for the under 7s; talks on bibliotherapy; a WW1 poppy inspired future field exhibition and get fit in February events. These events, and many others, complemented the regular library events programme. As part of the festivities, an online reading and libraries themed quiz was promoted for members of the public to enjoy. The programme of events was a great celebration of what Nottinghamshire Libraries have to offer.

**Letterbox Club Evaluation**

3. The Letterbox Club is a national programme which aims to improve the educational outlook for children, aged 7 – 13 years, who are Looked After by providing them with a parcel of books, maths activities and stationery items once every month for a six month period. Research has demonstrated that children can make significant changes in reading levels during their participation in the scheme.
4. 2014 was the fifth year Letterbox Club has been run in Nottinghamshire. The Virtual School for Looked After Children fund the parcels and associated administration costs. Nottinghamshire's Library Service administers the scheme, prepares parcels for posting and includes additional items with the aim of encouraging library usage. The 2014 cohort consisted of 106 children.

5. Results from the evaluation conducted at the end of the programme have been recently analysed. Of 103 questionnaires sent out 43 forms were returned in total (a 42% response rate). The questionnaire asked for children's overall view of the parcel contents, specifically the books and games. They were also asked for their views on reading. The form asked foster carers to comment on whether they felt the parcels had been beneficial, including if they felt interest in reading at school had changed. Questions were also asked about library usage. Key points include:
6. 32 out of 43 children said they liked the books in the parcels 'a lot'. Six said they liked them 'a little'. Five thought they were 'OK'.

*"They were fantastic" (8 year old girl)*

*"The books were good for skool [sic] work. Thank you" (9 year old boy)*

7. Children's positive response to the books in the parcels broadly matched their general attitude to reading. 20 children said they liked reading a 'lot' and 8 'a little' representing 72% of all the children who responded. Seven children said they thought reading was 'OK', four didn't like it much.
8. When considering how much they had liked the games in the parcels. 22 children said they liked them a 'lot', nine 'a little', seven thought them 'OK', two said they didn't like them 'much' and three said they didn't like the games at all.

*"They were interesting because they make me constrate [sic] when I play them" (12 year old boy)*

9. Overall children said they had enjoyed being part of the Letterbox Club. As in previous years children particularly appreciated having post delivered directly to them.

*"They were Amazing, Awsome, Cool and Interesting and its bought my hopes up" (12 year old boy)*

*"It was brill getting my own parcel" (9 year old boy)*

10. Foster carers were asked whether they felt their child had benefited from receiving the parcels. The response was overwhelmingly positive.

*"Parcels were just the right balance between fun and educational content"*

*"Yes, he really enjoys getting post and he loves reading. It made him feel special to get some parcels."*

11. In addition to carers commenting generally on whether the parcels had been beneficial for their child they were specifically asked whether they thought Letterbox had any impact on the child's interest in reading at school. 63% of those that answered said they thought that Letterbox had contributed to an increased interest in reading, with 36% saying they felt interest had stayed the same.

*"I have struggled to help develop my foster sons interest in reading – these parcels have helped tremendously"*

12. Just as with the children's comments there was a mixed picture as to how the maths games worked with individual children. As in previous years many carers highlighted how valuable the inclusion of the money games was.

*"She has come along in leaps and bounds with her maths and the board games has helped in knowing about money"*

13. Others mentioned that their child didn't make much use of the games.

*"She loved the books. The games are still in her drawer"*

14. Many foster carers commented how much their child had looked forward to receiving a parcel each month.

*"Yes I think it is a fantastic scheme, my foster son loves receiving the parcels and [Letterbox] has helped him build a really impressive collection of books of his own."*

*"A big yes, it was great for him to receive a letter posted to him. He treasured all the contents and read the books to his brother"*

15. The Letterbox Club will be run again in 2015 and will include a new parcel aimed at children in year 2.

### **Wiggle Giggle and Johnny and the Raindrops**

16. In December, Mansfield Central Library and Sutton-in-Ashfield Library hosted a performance from Nottingham Playhouse Theatre Company and Re: Play Theatre. In total 120 children aged 3 – 5 years, from local schools and nurseries, saw the production of WiggleGiggle; a unique blend of music and poetry to encourage listening and language skills.

17. In February, Nottingham based band Johnny and the Raindrops performed at Mansfield Central Library for an enthusiastic audience of under 7s and their families. 125 attended to celebrate National Libraries Day and joined in with original songs about pirates, washing machines and books. The band was joined on stage for one song by children who had been learning instruments with Notts Performing Arts Centre at Brunts School. Some of the comments from families received after the performance include:

*"Great idea to bring libraries to life in another way!"*

*"Superb. Great music. Need more of this in Mansfield for kids"*

*"Absolutely fantastic, whole family enjoyed it"*

## **Rufford Craft Centre Exhibitions**

18. The Christmas exhibition at the Craft Centre showcased the work of fifteen artists who displayed work in a wide range of art forms from silver to glass, ceramics, textiles and painting. Specifically designed for Christmas gifts, the exhibition attracted 2,986 appreciative people.

*'Wonderful worthwhile exhibition and a great platform for artists.'*

*'Wonderful inspiring work - Congratulations to all concerned!'*

19. In January the Craft Centre hosted the preview of a major new exhibition by the National Holocaust Centre. The exhibition looked not at the history of the Holocaust, but at the post-war response of the German people to the crimes committed in their name: responses of silence, outrage, reconciliation, and memorialisation. The Holocaust Centre asked to preview the exhibition at the Craft Centre to engage with a different section of the community than they attracted to Laxton. A disturbing exhibition. Well received by visitors, it provided a thought provoking experience and a moment of reflection.

*'Excellent – liked the international focus of the exhibition.'*

20. At the beginning of February the Rufford Art Society opened their biennial exhibition of members' work. For almost twenty years this group of enthusiasts have met at Rufford to explore all types of visual arts in regular artist and member led workshops. The varied collection of art works showed the different interests and skills of the members and their continued enthusiasm for the visual arts.

*'Always a pleasure to visit this gallery!'*

*'An excellent inspiring exhibition. Well done everyone.'*

## **Creative Communities**

21. The Arts service has begun a new four month creative project with Wynndale Primary School in Mansfield. The school has been awarded Artsmark Gold status and wished to build on this success and celebrate their achievement. Working with parents, carers and pupils, an artist from the Craft Centre will be creating a series of mosaics that encapsulate and display a flavour of the school to the outside world. The mosaics will be launched in May and be a legacy not only of the creative talents of the participants but also of new creative skills learnt.

## **Creative Older People**

22. A programme of training for staff from residential homes and specialised day centres for older people and adults with learning disabilities is continuing at the Craft Centre. These sessions support the centres to achieve the National Care Quality Commission standards by giving staff practical arts skills and techniques to enable them to engage residents and users in creative activities.

23. The programme has included paper cutting techniques, working with recycled plastic and 'painting on a tea tray' which was developed to specifically engage residents who are confined to a bed or chair. All the activities have been designed by artists to be run with cheap easily found materials with no specialist equipment, making them easily replicated by staff in care settings.

### **Creative Families**

24. During the half term break Rufford Craft Centre gives children, parents and carers the opportunity to get creative, together with a full programme of drop in sessions. Activities on offer included: basic skills with clay; wet felting techniques; ideas for paper engineering; Chinese brush painting; sculpture; mosaic; painting on silk and using recycled materials.

### **Creative Leaders**

25. Over the last six years the Arts Service has developed a programme of drawing across the County, involving thousands of people in the national Big Draw celebration each October. Our method of engagement has received two national awards for its innovative approach involving training non-arts individuals within the community.
26. A new training programme started in February specifically aimed at leaders, teachers, carers and volunteers working with groups in the community. The training focuses on practical drawing activities and ideas of how to use drawing to achieve the wider aims of the groups. The overall thrust of the programme is to build capacity within our communities to increase creative opportunities. The latest sessions give new leaders and those involved in last year's Big Draw new inspiration and new skills and enables them to discuss how they can support each other.

### **COUNTRY PARKS AND GREEN ESTATES**

27. The Christmas season at Rufford Abbey and Sherwood Forest featured a number of popular events, including the traditional Santa's Grottos at parks, children's trails, a midwinter lantern walk through Sherwood Forest and the annual Tree Dressing celebrations. This year it was decided to rest the Aurora Illuminations event at Rufford abbey and to trial a new one, called "Sparkling Sherwood." This featured a trail around the evening forest, with the ancient oaks and silver birches of the woodland gently illuminated in coloured light. A favourite with most visitors was seeing the Major Oak lit with moving laser lights, giving the impression of a swarm of glow-worms. The event sold out so it is planned to continue it next winter and possibly to extend to extra dates.
28. Winter weather kept onsite teams busy, with the weight of heavy snowfall on several days bringing down large numbers of trees and branches. Whilst Rufford Abbey and Sherwood Forest Country Parks were forced to close to the public for short periods during heavy snowfall, park rangers and wardens worked hard to clear paths of obstructions, and to clear fallen timber. The majority of this wood was sawn into short lengths and sold to park visitors for firewood.
29. In a departure from normal opening times, Bestwood Winding Engine House open days and tours continued through the winter period this year rather than April to October only.

This was enabled by the support of the Winding Engine House volunteer group and the Friends of Bestwood Country Park, who run a successful community café in the nearby Dynamo House building.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

- 1) That the update on a range of initiatives being undertaken to improve and enhance the quality of life for Nottinghamshire people be noted.

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