

Booktrust Pilot 08

Final Report

Wigan

April 2009

W I G A N
LEISURE & CULTURE
T R U S T
in partnership with Wigan Council

booktrust



department for
children, schools and families

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Booktrust Pilot 08 Final Report **Wigan**

1.0 Booktrust Pilot 08

Pilot 08 was a reading study and strategic advocacy project, conducted in partnership between Booktrust, Wigan Council and Suffolk County Council, as a contribution to the legacy of the National Year of Reading. The aims of the pilot were to prove the intrinsic value of reading and the positive impact that it can have upon a wide range of local and national priorities, with a view to embedding reading in all activity.

This report is intended to offer an insight into our experience of working on the Booktrust 08 pilot.

The document chronicles the way we approached the project, our experiences of partnership working and the benefits of having someone in a dedicated, overarching reader development role.

It is intended to be an accessible account of our journey, to help inspire and encourage other authorities to develop a strong reading culture and work towards a reading and literacy strategy. It may be particularly useful to show how much can be achieved in a relatively short period of time in order to help maximise project impact and sustainability.



Books being issued in a community setting

2.0 Introduction by Booktrust

As part of our commitment to the National Year of Reading (NYR) legacy, Booktrust worked in partnership with Wigan Leisure and Culture Trust (in partnership with Wigan Council) and Suffolk County Council, to deliver two study and advocacy projects on reading and literacy, funded by the Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF).

With Booktrust funding and support for a project manager in each of the two local authorities for one year, Wigan and Suffolk were able to identify and map existing provision, pilot some new activity and advocate for the implementation of a coherent and coordinated programme of reading and literacy initiatives.

Booktrust were particularly interested to explore how the bookgifting programmes, Bookstart, Booktime and Booked Up, work in practice and how they are contributing to a cohesive provision throughout a child's reading journey from babyhood, through primary school and teenage years.

Our shared aim is that the pilots will act as a catalyst for the creation of an enduring and effective reading and literacy strategy in each authority. We also hope that the final reports and ongoing advocacy will contribute to the wider body of work which is being conducted around the promotion of reading strategies.

We have very much enjoyed working with colleagues in Wigan and Suffolk, and understand better the local challenges – and successes – which will inform our programmes and support activities in the future. We have been truly inspired by the enthusiasm and passionate commitment of everyone working in Wigan and Suffolk to promote reading within their communities.

The Pilot Project Managers were asked to explore the provision of reading promotion and reader development and to celebrate, and build upon, existing good practice in the authority, with a view to informing the development of a strategic approach to reading in their authority.

The Booktrust national bookgifting programmes and a wide range of other reading activities were examined, to see if it is possible to work more cohesively and help forge strong and diverse partnerships, both within the local authority, outside agencies and community groups.

The Pilot was undertaken in three phases:

1. Mapping of existing reader development activity in the borough: who was delivering what, where and for whom.
2. Delivery – considering proposals from the Pilot Advisory Group, exploring examples of good practice in the authority and organising events that would build partnerships, add value to existing provision or meet a perceived need.
3. Going forward – exploring the importance of reading and the rationale for the development and implementation of strategy.

This was broadly adhered to, although there was some considerable overlap of phases two and three. The project had originally been planned for one year, to be completed in March 2009. Because of some inevitable slippage, due to recruitment, the projects did not begin until July 2008, although the final reports were to be completed by the end of the original projected year, in March 2009. The work that has already begun, in terms of the strategy and partnerships, will continue at least until the roles end in June 2009 and hopefully beyond.



Children enjoy meeting Theo – our Bookstart Bear!

3.0 The Wigan Pilot Experience

3.1 Setting the Scene

Reader development is a priority in Wigan, as evidenced by the enthusiastic work being carried out in schools, such as Fred Longworth and Shevington, with support from many quarters. Wigan Words, our local literary festival, is now in its sixth year, and continues to grow in diversity and popularity. Andy Burnham, Culture Secretary, has publicly expressed his support for its rich mix.

We recognise the importance of literacy in addressing inequality, by helping to reduce worklessness and increasing the existing low skill levels of our workforces. In order to deliver effectively on this, we need to adopt a formal cross-agency approach to literacy and reader development activity. The pilot offered us a unique opportunity to do this, by funding the role of project manager. No single agency might see the benefit of funding such a role, which is able to have such an overarching view. The value of the role soon became apparent, however, even through the short life of the pilot.

Wigan is the only authority in the country with a dedicated Step In To Learning co-ordinator, which has led to us leading the way with an exciting new partnership initiative, in providing this training for health care professionals.

3.2 The Role of Pilot Project Manager

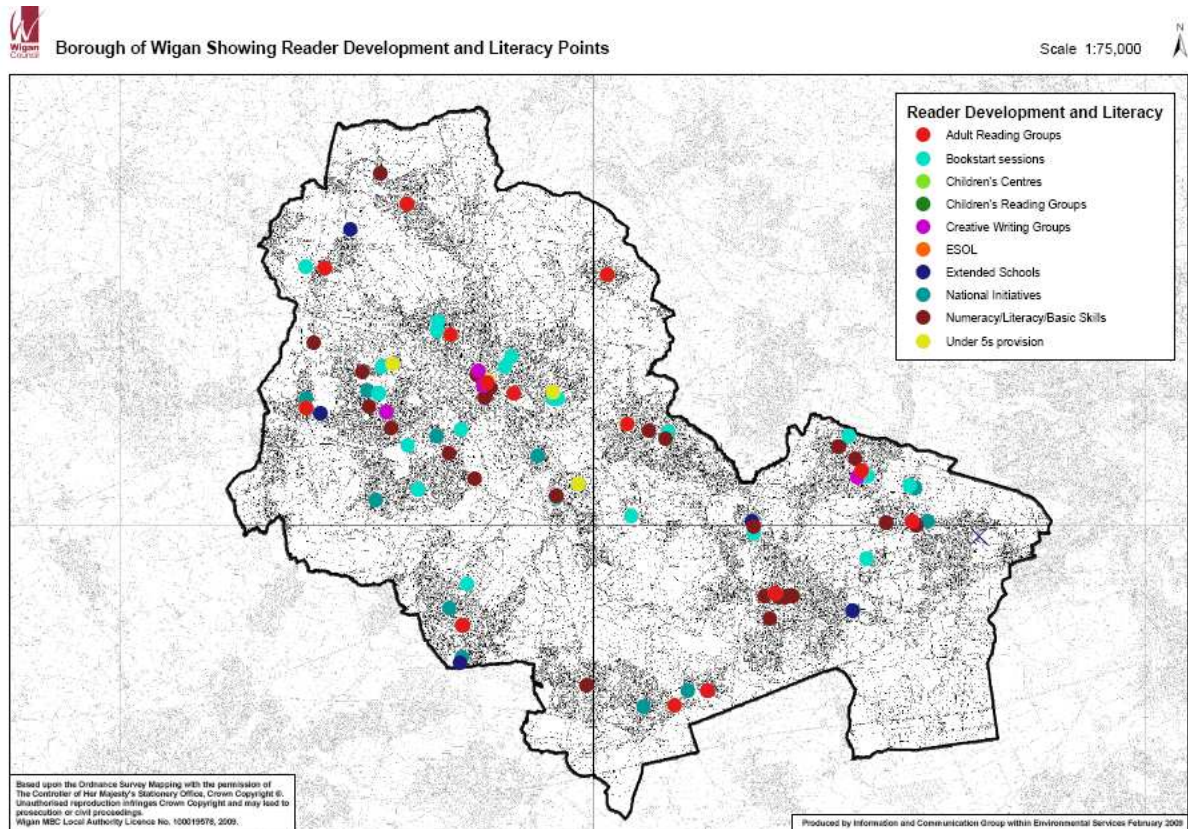
In June 2009, Carole Ogden was appointed to the role of Booktrust Pilot 08 Project Manager, having the advantage of already having held a two-year role in Wigan Leisure & Culture Trust's Library Service. Whilst the previous role had had a very specific remit, it meant that we had in place someone who knew Wigan Libraries worked and already had some knowledge of local services and communities.

Although it may sound straightforward, Phase One of the project, mapping reader development activity, raised a number of questions about our project boundaries. After much consideration, we decided to include literacy and basic skills provision, but only when it was permanently available. Given the length of the project, we did not feel it worthwhile to include short-term initiatives. We also included ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) support. The results were plotted onto our Council Intranet Global Information System, to produce a map of the activity. The results were much as expected, with activity mostly taking place around libraries, extended schools, community venues and children's centres.

The mapping involved quite a lot of investigation and gave a valuable insight into some of the positive work that was going on, and of which we had no previous knowledge. By using existing contacts and the internet, in particular local databases of community groups, and then

through speaking to people in those groups, it was possible to develop a much fuller and more informed picture of what was available locally and of what there was a perceived need for.

The real benefit of the mapping exercise will be realised as the strategy develops, as the format offers ongoing, updated information about the area, economic and social trends.



It soon became apparent that there was a considerable overlap of provision for certain groups, and potential gaps in services for others. Very often this was due to funding constraints, which raised another issue: that of a 'blinkered' approach to delivery. Often there are several groups competing for a single pot of money. The work involved in developing a bid for that money can be considerable and time-consuming, and this can lead to the groups working in isolation.

Developing positive relationships, which may help to build sustainability into a project, takes time and effort. They also require some flexibility and compromise, since many groups have specific agendas. Unfortunately, the work involved in seeking out such partnerships and trying to overcome these potential difficulties can often be a stumbling block, particularly to voluntary organisations. Another contributory factor, and one that the role was able to help address, was the fact that people simply were not aware of other groups and organisations that could offer support or join together in partnerships. Information is often

available, but it takes time and effort to find it. The role of the Pilot Project Manager has been invaluable, as an advice and support mechanism and in identifying gaps in provision and the potential for partnerships to help fill those gaps.



It is so valuable for families to share books

3.3 Examples of Projects Arising from Mapping

Creative Writing

We were approached by a senior creative writing tutor at Bolton University (which is an adjoining authority) to ask whether we might be able to offer a placement to a mature PGCE creative writing student. He was looking for hands-on adult community writing experience and was, in fact, already a well-known local writer and performer.

This gave us a mutually beneficial situation, where we could offer our libraries either a one-off event or a series of sessions, to see if they were popular. We were able, at low cost, offer our users new opportunities and challenges, while the student has the opportunity to increase his contact hours, experience different groups and communities and raise his own profile for the future. I have become his mentor, as I have a background in teaching creative writing, and he receives support and feedback to enable him to develop his teaching skills. As a result, we have already started four new groups and given additional support to an existing group.

Express Group

The Express Group is run by the local Primary Care Trust. Patients with mild to moderate depression are recommended to the programme by their doctors and they attend activity sessions, such as art and creative writing, for a fixed number of weeks. The first group were coming to the end of their funded period and the organiser was concerned that the social interaction would end and the group's progress would potentially be lost. After discussion, we decided to move the group from their usual meeting place, into the library. Our Reader in Residence offered to support the group for an indefinite period, and they now meet on a fortnightly basis to discuss books. It is hoped that new members will join from the current Express Group, when their art sessions finish in the next few weeks. One member of the reading group has already become an avid borrower and an active participant in library author events.

Cath Foxon, Health Development Officer from Ashton, Leigh and Wigan Primary Care Trust, who organises the Express sessions, offered the following comments about the pilot:

'The Booktrust pilot has provided me with a valuable resource in Carole Ogden. There is such enormous potential to work with patients with mild to moderate depression by setting up groups to enjoy reading and discussion. They might prove useful routes into the conventional bookclubs that might not be readily accessed by these patients. Carole's advice and practical support has helped us set up a successful pilot reading group. There is so much potential for reading groups for better mental health that could be developed if the role was sustained and expanded.'

3.4 Reading Promotion – building on partnerships, exploring new ideas and examples of best practice

Moving into Phase Two of the project involved trying out new ideas and approaches in our delivery.

Proposals

A Pilot Advisory Group of interested stakeholder groups was set up by Booktrust and asked to forward proposals to the two pilots for consideration. Proposals were received from Booktime, Booked Up, Bookstart, the Poetry Society, Everybody Writes and Children's Book Week. It was decided that the proposals from Everybody Writes and Children's Book Week were more appropriate to schools, so these were passed on to our local primary and secondary Literacy Consultants for consideration.

Unfortunately, with the slippage in timescales on the project, the timing of all the proposals meant that it was rather too late for us to deliver as effectively as we would have liked. The Booktime event was to take place in October, with the Booked Up in November. We had a relatively short time to plan for these, especially as we had already started planning our own events to support the gifting process. The valuable support of Booktrust, however, enabled us to try a different approach to the type of events we had anticipated.

Bookstart

As part of the pilot, we were lucky enough to be given a Bookstart Bear to help our NYR celebrations, and he found himself involved in meeting a number of celebrities, including: several authors, Wigan Athletic footballers, the Culture Secretary Andy Burnham and Emmerdale star Joseph Gilgun (Eli Dingle). We even had a competition to name him, and he now proudly bears the name Theo - short for Theodore. Theo has attended many under-fives events throughout the year and proved very popular with adults and children alike. Our bear has helped to raise the profile of Bookstart gifting in library and community settings.

Booktime

Our Children's Team had, the previous year, held small local activities in libraries themed around the Booktime book. These had been well attended but it was questionable whether it attracted new library members or led to book issues. As part of their proposal, Booktime organised a visit from Ian Whybrow, the author of the Booktime book 'Harry and the Dinosaurs go to School' for us. In order to make best use of his time, we decided to try a big event, to be held in a fairly central position in the borough. We weren't sure whether this would be successful as we traditionally have difficulty in finding a suitable venue. Wigan has two main towns - Wigan and Leigh - and the borough is quite large. We very often duplicate events, by holding one in each of these towns, so that they are accessible to most people.

We put a party invitation into our Booktime bags, together with local library information and a simplified joining form. This meant that every Reception age child in Wigan received one. We then worked on a first come, first served, basis, by taking telephone bookings. Our venue limit was 350, including parents/carers and siblings, and we soon filled all the places.

We brought together the Active Living team, Family Learning, the PCT, Schools Library Service, Bookstart team and Libraries' Children's Team to offer advice and information on their services, as well as offering a range of craft and physical activities and healthy snacks. We had asked children to bring their books along and we encouraged families to get together and read along with Ian, as the pages were projected onto a large screen. Many people enjoyed reading together and doing some of the craft activities which Booktime had included on their website.

This was the single biggest book-related event for young people that we had ever undertaken and we were pleased with the response. As the event wasn't taking place in a library we decided to take along multiple copies of books with a dinosaur-related theme, together with a selection of other titles for both slightly older children and babies. By offering a free draw for a craft set for anyone taking out a book, we managed to attract 6 new members on the day and issued around 50 books. The books were recorded and issued manually, then transferred onto our system on return to the library. We felt this was a simple idea, that worked well, and we intend to repeat it at similar outreach events. By sampling the results, it would be possible to see whether lapsed users had returned, and whether people who took out books on the day continued to do so in the future. To come to any conclusions about its success, however, the process would need to be repeated for several events, and tracked for a reasonable period of time.

Booked Up

We were chosen to host one of the five regional Booked Up events and were delighted to find that our authors were Malcolm Rose and Derek Landy. Both of their books had proved very popular choices with the Year 7 pupils and they were keen to meet them and ask questions. We worked with the high schools to put together two events, where two host schools (on different sides of the borough) then invited another two local high schools along. This meant we were able to share the experience with a total of six schools and most of the children were able to get their books signed as well! We have found that this co-operative approach helps us to get best value from author visits, share the experience more fairly and widely between schools in the borough and encourages them to work more closely together.

Our Schools Library Service had launched the first Wigan Explore Book of the Year award in 2008 - 'Explore' is Wigan Libraries' branding. The competition winners, chosen by local schools, were 'The

'Black Tattoo' by Sam Enthoven (secondary) and 'Skulduggery Pleasant' by Derek Landy (primary). This happy coincidence meant that Derek could be presented with his award during his visit – something that had seemed unlikely, as he seldom visits England for author visits. The host school for the awards ceremony developed a wonderful film to promote the value of reading for pleasure, which was shown before the event and helped to set the scene and raise enthusiasm before the winners were finally revealed! The ceremony also saw the launch of the 2009 Explore Book Award.

Our work with schools is helped greatly by the support given to us by Wigan's primary and secondary Literacy Consultants, who work within Children and Young People's Services. They have offered us a platform for consultation, and dissemination of information, and actively support and promote our initiatives around reading and creative writing. This work is also underpinned by our close work with the Schools Library Service. By working together we avoid duplication of work and ideas, and can often find ways of overcoming potential barriers by sharing our resources and experience.

Joyce Holden, Secondary Teaching & Learning/Literacy consultant in Wigan, offered the following comments on the pilot:

“During the last year I have worked with Carole on the National Year of Reading initiative and her ideas, advice and resources have been valuable. Schools like Fred Longworth High School and St Edmund Arrowsmith High School have strongly promoted enjoyment of reading and, with Carole's support, successfully liaised to dovetail the teachers' and students' work. Her enthusiasm and desire to help colleagues in a real and practical way has been most helpful and I hope it continues as the strong link it has proved to be.

I look forward to continuing this professional relationship which contributes to the improvement and provision of quality reading for our young people.”

A New Idea - Mother and Baby

We were very interested in the idea of the Baby Cafes, as introduced in Suffolk, but unfortunately felt that the national branding would not work in our libraries. We do not have suitable facilities for preparing refreshments, and there are Health & Safety issues with hot drinks. In addition, we felt that it was rather too prescriptive, as it is quite exclusively about breastfeeding and some mothers may be put off by this focus.

We did feel, however, that it would be really useful to trial a café-style club for women in late pregnancy, through to the baby being around six months old. Health visitors will support by identifying and inviting along mothers-to-be during their final weeks of pregnancy, and they can meet

other mums-to-be and new mums in their area. The Breastfeeding Counsellor and Health Visitor will take turns to talk, in an informal setting, about any concerns and the mothers can share their experiences and provide support to each other. As one of our libraries, in Standish, will shortly be incorporating a Phase Three Children's Centre, it provides us with an ideal opportunity to trial the group. We have had discussions with the local healthcare professionals and they are excited at the prospect of starting a new group that can reach mothers at such a vital stage.

Library staff will bring along a selection of books each week, for example the parent's collection, relaxation or recipe books, together with board books for babies. The Bookstart team will start off by leading the sessions and it is hoped that staff will then take it over if it becomes popular. By including some music and rhymes for the babies, we will be showing the positive effect of interacting with young babies and the importance of sharing time with them. This will then lead naturally on to Bookstart rhymetime sessions after six months, and the under 5s later. The club will offer an informal way of reaching mums-to-be at a crucial stage, both in terms of book sharing and breastfeeding encouragement and support.

A New Partnership – The Poetry Society

Each year, in April, Wigan holds a community literary festival, called 'Words'. We work closely with the festival coordinator to support and promote the festival, and to help widen its appeal to children and young people as well as adults.

This year, as part of our collaboration, we will be working with the Poetry Society, to invite a young slam poet called Chris Preddie to Wigan. Chris will visit two local high schools during the day to perform his work and speak to the pupils and will also visit our local prison to work with the young men. This is the first time the Poetry Society has asked one of their young associates to travel further afield than London.

We have also developed an early evening event, which will be hosted by the Words Festival and Libraries. Using a local venue on the town centre, we are inviting along young people from the sixth form colleges and our local British Minority Ethnic (BME) group Rafiki, as well as groups accompanied by the Youth Offending Team (YOT) and youth workers.

This is a new kind of event for us and we are excited by the possibilities it offers for cross-agency working and engaging the hard-to-reach. We will also be offering the young people a platform for self-expression, as Chris will work with them on their own performance pieces, during an open mic session. One of the challenges for this event will be how to evaluate it effectively, and ensure that we get feedback from the young people as well as from partner agencies.

We are currently reviewing our evaluation procedures, in order to ensure that they become embedded into our provision. It is apparent that we need to address the tokenistic approach that is so often adopted by both our own service and those of partner agencies. It is becoming increasingly necessary, especially in the current economic climate, to justify what we are doing and prove it has value. This cannot be done if we do not follow up activities in order to determine how effective they were in meeting our objectives and then maintaining, or changing, that approach by revisiting on a regular basis.

3.5 Other Positive Partners and Initiatives

As the pilot progressed, a number of other partnership opportunities arose in addition to the proposals :



Bookstart Bear and Emmerson Boyce share a good read

Latics Literacy

Our Schools Library Service was approached by the Wigan Athletic 'Latics Literacy' scheme, to ask if we would be able to support their work in promoting reading for pleasure within local primary schools. This is a rolling programme, working with Year 5 groups, in eight schools at a time. They work closely with reluctant readers, encouraging them to read more widely across a full range of media through positive sporting role models. The reading work is then followed by a P.E. session, with a football focus.

We were pleased to be able to offer them a long-term loan of mixed non-fiction (from library stock) and fiction (surplus books from the Boys into Books project). Also, as a result of our discussions with the scheme co-ordinator, they have now included library membership into their delivery and take all their classes into a local library for an orientation visit. They also distribute membership forms prior to the visit, so children can join on the day and take a book home. The library visits are supported by our Children's Team. This is a positive new partnership that is valuable to both parties, and has worked very well. It also links with our involvement in the Premier League Reading Stars and Reading the Game initiatives

Wigan Words Literary Festival

In addition to our poetry slam event partnership with Words, we are also hosting a number of their author events in libraries, including Jimmy McGovern and Frank Cottrell Boyce. We shall also be working together on a mobile phone text competition, following the success of our NYR 'Christmas Future' text Christmas story. This time the theme will be 'Millions', to link with Frank Cottrell Boyce's book and film of the same name. Local sixth form colleges picked up the competition last year and prepared their own publicity for students. We intend to try and better our response by marketing it at all the Festival events, as well as on our website and in libraries. The Christmas competition was the first time we had tried using technology in this way, and we were pleased with the response and quality of entries. Competitions like this appeal to all ages, so help to inspire creativity and reach new audiences.

Time to Read

We work very closely with our local Time to Read coordinator – a role that came about as a legacy of the National Year of Reading 1998. Time to Read North West is a network of 22 authorities that support each other and share experiences and resources. It helps to provide a framework for reader development activity and develops shared initiatives, such as the 'Pure Passion' romantic fiction promotion.

It was especially timely that our Booktrust pilot coincided with the production of Time to Read's second regional Reader Development Strategy, 'Readers for Life 2' for the North West http://www.time-to-read.co.uk/Toolkits/readers_for_life/strategy.asp. The first strategy (published 2005) "was intended to help structure local strategies, acting as evidence that promoting reading contributes to the major political and cultural agendas driving library services". The second strategy document builds on the work of the first, and shows how a reading strategy links to national Performance Indicators.

Other highlights include:

- Libraries commissioned a Story Chair for the National Year of Reading, which raised the profile of reading activity and was used by a number of celebrities, local dignitaries and schoolchildren. Some schools were even inspired to create their own!
- We held a successful Crime Scene event, which brought a variety of crime authors to Wigan.
- We invited all our reading groups to a celebration and discussion evening, with a local author.
- The Secondary Literacy Co-ordinator continued to build on the successful and high-quality Public Speaking competition for high schools, called Team Talk.
- The Book Ahead and Boys into Books initiatives were rolled out, and were supported with training for professionals.
- Our Bookstart team continued their outstanding outreach work and were recognised by receiving a partnership award. Our big blue Bookstart bear was also named, and started his own blog.
- Bookstart Rhymetime training was delivered to staff from libraries, children's centres and early years professionals: Bookstart Rhymetime Training Pilot in Wigan - (Interim Report).doc
- Our children's team tried a different, and very successful, approach to delivering the Summer Reading Challenge which saw us working with local primary schools. This led to an large increase in the completion rate.

4.0 The Reading Strategy

We have now embarked upon the final phase of the Pilot: we have started writing a five-year reading and literacy strategy, which is designed to embed reader promotion at the heart of the borough's priorities, and which we hope will be finalised and adopted at Local Authority Agreement level by Summer 2009.

4.1 Emerging Strategy

4.1.1 The rationale for reading and literacy promotion

"The value of reading... stretches far beyond the benefits to the individual. It brings social benefits. It is hard for people to be active citizens unless they can read newspapers and government publications."

Framework for the Future (DCMS 2003)

It is widely recognised that literacy standards have been declining over recent years, leading to an increasing legacy of social and economic problems. We have seen a generation for whom education was not an option, as the need to provide for the family took priority, followed by changes in education provision and delivery that led to further disengaged adults, for whom school was an unhappy experience. As society has changed, so an increasing lack of employment opportunities has led to further disillusion and lack of motivation. This is particularly true in Wigan, which is far below the national average in literacy, numeracy and knowledge driven employment.

4.1.2 The importance of reading for pleasure

There is also evidence that reading for pleasure not only impacts on reading achievement but also increases:

- general knowledge (e.g. Cunningham & Stanovich, 1998);
- a better understanding of other cultures (Meek, 1991);
- community participation (e.g. Bus, van Ljzendoorm & Pellegrini, 1995);
- a greater insight into human nature and decision-making (Bruner, 1996)

Quoted in *Reading for pleasure: A research overview* by Clark, C. & Rumbold, K, National Literacy Trust:, 2006

Research shows that parental involvement in their children's learning positively affects the child's performance at school (Fan & Chen, 2001) in both primary and secondary schools (Feinstein & Symons, 1999), leading to higher academic achievement, greater cognitive competence, greater problem-solving skills, greater school enjoyment, better school attendance and fewer behavioural problems at school (Melhuish, Sylva, Sammons et al., 2001).

Physical activity, socialization and reading are associated to a better cognitive performance. It can be hypothesized that these factors can concur to cognitive decline prevention in elderly people.

Comunicazione presentata dagli Autori al 3° Congresso Nazionale FIMEG (Roma 23-25 giugno 2008). Atti Congressuali pubblicati dalla Casa Editrice Scientifica Internazionale (C.E.S.I. 2008.), via Cremona, 19 -00161 Roma.

Developing a strong reading culture can help us to meet LAA priorities:

1. Reducing social exclusion for the elderly and other vulnerable adults
2. Developing an ambitious community: Improving skills to meet business needs
3. Building a stronger community that provides positive activities for young people
4. Improving community confidence, participation and cohesion
5. Improving the aspirations, attainment and life chances of children and young people from the most disadvantaged communities

As the local PCT recognised at the Public Health Conference in 2008, Wigan is undergoing significant and rapid demographic change. The school census for 2007 suggested that 51 languages are now spoken by pupils in Wigan schools, and approximately 6,400 migrants have been received in Wigan over the last seven years.

4.1.3 The Wigan reader development strategy

The Wigan Reader Development Strategy is being developed in order to try and address some of the challenges facing our ever-changing society, and to recognise the intrinsic value of reading for pleasure.

Whilst we accept that "literacy is a fundamental precursor to participation in culture" (NLT), this strategy will focus primarily on developing reading skills and broadening readers' experience. The Wigan Borough Lifelong Learning Strategy 2008-2013 looks more closely at literacy and basic skills delivery and provision

but inevitably this is sometimes indivisible from reader development.

Aims and Objectives

The strategy aims to:

- Recognise and disseminate good practice in relation to reader development for all ages
- Develop and strengthen partnerships between agencies and community groups
- Offer ESOL and emergent readers coherent and co-ordinated support in their development and progression
- Offer stimulating and thought-provoking events for readers
- Encourage community participation and cohesion, thereby reducing social isolation
- Provide a wide range of reading materials for all ages and abilities
- Increase aspirations and motivation
- Work towards a systematic evaluation model

4.1.4 Challenges and opportunities - current provision

- **Only 20.4% of Wigan's residents are qualified to NVQ level 4 and above, which is nearly a third lower than the national average**
- **In the most deprived Super Output areas, people only have a 50% chance of being in work**

The main providers of literacy and basic skills within the borough are:

Working Wonders and Family Learning, via community and library settings

Extended Schools and Wigan & Leigh College

Children's Centres and community-led activities

Reading activities are supported in the borough by:

Libraries and Bookshops

Words Festival

Reading and Creative Writing Groups

There are also some workplace learning initiatives with whom links could be made, offering possible opportunities for joined-up working. The launch of the new BBC RAW Skills for Everyday Life campaign could offer us new opportunities for using their resources for adult information and education.

Through the work of schools, the Bookstart team, Libraries Children's Team, Schools Library Service, and the local primary and secondary literacy consultants, children and young people are quite well served, in terms of reader development. We also attend the Transition event in January, which supports young people with learning difficulties and provides useful networking opportunities.

Looked after Children are gifted books by Wigan Libraries and we have made a pledge to continue to support local children's homes and foster families by maintaining a regular presence at the Carers Christmas Party, where we gift books and library information to young people in care and their siblings. Next year we hope to involve other agencies in this as well, to add value. Links have already been made with youth groups and Young Carers groups, one of which now regularly visits Leigh Library.

4.1.5 Developing strands

As a result of the mapping exercise and the activities we have been holding, we soon found that some structure for the strategy started to emerge.

Increasing numbers of Economic Migrants

Although Wigan has traditionally not had a high population of ethnic minorities, there are now areas which are seeing an increasing influx of economic migrants, particularly from Eastern Europe. With so many different languages spoken (40+ in Leigh alone) and with so many different ages and cultures to take into account, it can be difficult to provide appropriate and sustainable services. Since this is not our area of expertise, we really need the assistance of other specialist agencies to help us formulate an effective delivery strategy for working with these groups. They also provide the necessary conduit to enable us to carry out consultation and offer our services.

From discussion, it is clear that there are barriers that may stop certain groups accessing events. For example, there may be a need for us to offer female-only, beginners' computer courses. Working with LASAR (Leigh Asylum Seekers and Refugees) has also helped to inform our stock policy. It is clear that it would be an almost impossible task to provide reading materials to cater for all ages, languages and cultures. Most asylum seekers prefer to read text in English, to improve their skills. Whilst our standard emergent reader stock might be useful with some ESOL students, there are many titles that contain inappropriate material for some cultures. Also, the students do not necessarily have difficulties in reading, and the texts may prove too easy. By working closely with providers we intend to include pilot

collections at our two main libraries, Leigh and Wigan, that are specifically aimed at ESOL developing readers.

We intend to utilise the partnerships we already have, to enable us to consider what we might practicably be able to offer our local BME communities. We need to do considerably more work in this area, in order to understand the needs of these groups and to be able to offer more support to them.

Isolated individuals, the elderly and vulnerable

We are due to meet with the PCT and Booktrust, to share the information we have already gathered and to discuss other ways in which we can work together. As mentioned earlier in the report, we have already been working with the Express group in Leigh, supporting people with mild to moderate depression by encouraging them to take part in creative activities. When the first group reached the end of their programme, we invited them into the library, which is in the same building as the gallery they work in and therefore a reasonable transition.

Some of the group felt able to return to work or studies, but our Reader-in-Residence is supporting the others by hosting an ongoing reading and discussion group. This has offered the scheme continuity as the current group's programme finishes shortly and they will also be offered the chance to join the reading group. Joining a mainstream reading group is rather too much of a challenge at this stage, although it is hoped that, in time, the Express participants might feel able to take part in other library activities.

We would like to investigate outreach work with care/residential homes, housing associations and support groups, and one way that we might be able to work effectively with them is by following the lead of the Reader Organisation's Get Into Reading scheme - running outreach, read-aloud groups of mixed ability. This is one of the topics we need to revisit, as it needs considerable organisation and volunteer participation. This approach will also require cross-agency support in identifying participants and being sensitive to specific needs.

It may be possible that we could look into links with our local college, or Bolton University, to find students who might run community reading groups and could use the contact to help as part of their studies (Health & Social Care etc.) Links with Bolton University are also useful in promoting our library author events to interested parties.

Emergent Readers

Working with the main literacy and basic skills providers, we intend to develop a library offer to emergent readers. This would involve a borough-wide branding and coding of emergent reader stock, to an agreed standard that is readily understood by all. We intend to speak to NIACE (National Institute of Adult Continuing Education) about this, to see if they can offer some guidance and support.

Whilst the literacy providers endeavour to use everyday texts in their programmes, it is clear that not all participants continue to develop their reading further, despite signposting. A structured path of progressively harder texts, that could be accessed by all at their own pace, would be a valuable addition to our services and provide a useful resource for partners.

The stock that we currently have for emergent readers varies from library to library, and we are working with partners to enable us to develop a more consistent approach, with interesting and appropriate stock.

As part of the offer, we need to consider staff training, in order to raise awareness of our customers' possible literacy needs and to consider an approach that would help to put new users at ease. A solution discussed with one partner organisation was that an agreed symbol be used to identify emergent reader stock, which follows through the spectrum of colours, depending on level. Tutors would have a stock of library invitation, which they could give to their students, with a sticker to identify their level. The tutors would be encouraged to bring their students along to their local library, or send them in with the invitation. Our staff would be able to recognise, without explanation, that the holder was an emergent reader and would give them an orientation tour of the library. By talking to the customer they could ascertain their interests and show them where books on specific subject areas would be, as well as the emergent reader stock, how to use the computers etc. This orientation visit need only be ten minutes or so, and would therefore not impact greatly on staff time. Arguably it is a courtesy that we should offer new members as a matter of course and this will also be fed back via staff training.

5.0 Conclusions

The Booktrust pilot has offered us a valuable opportunity. Not only have we had the chance to recognise and celebrate all the good work that is already going on in Wigan to support reader development and literacy, but we have also been able to consider how agencies could work more effectively together to offer greater opportunities and build in sustainability.

The major advantage afforded to us by the pilot was that the role enabled us to take an overview of provision, across all agencies and community groups. We found that quite often there was a sudden flurry of activity in a geographical area, in response to funding streams. Generally the activities taking place overlapped, as there was no communication between the groups involved. Unfortunately all activity ceased as soon as the funding ended, and it is questionable how positive the outcomes of these activities were, as a result. For communities to go from a situation where they have an embarrassment of riches to absolutely nothing, within a matter of months, can actually cause more social problems in the long run.

Very often it was clear that we were trying to re-invent the wheel. By bringing together the skill and experience of other agencies, we could save ourselves a lot of time and effort, as well as offering much better value. The pilot gave us a conduit to show communities and other agencies what we were already doing, and gave them a chance to consider what we might do for them.

Many opportunities started to emerge through the pilot and it is clear that a year is not enough to take them forward. In reality we have packed a great deal into just eight months. We have mapped ongoing activity, yet not really had time to look closely at the data and consider it in relation to other factors that might impact on the results. There is much more that can be done in terms of considering gaps in provision and this will be an ongoing process, now that the basic mapping has been completed.

The proposals received from the Pilot Advisory Group, and the support of Booktrust, gave us the opportunity to consider new ways of supporting the national bookgifting programmes. Traditionally we have anticipated problems in delivering activities and events in a convenient central position, as Wigan Borough has two main towns: Wigan and Leigh. The event at Hindley, however, proved very popular and showed us that it is possible for us to hold an event in a non-library location, with partner support, and that people would travel to attend. We managed to maintain a library presence however, and intend to use this model for future community events.

Our strong relationship with the schools' literacy consultants helped to bring together the high schools for the Booked Up event and it linked neatly with the Explore Book of the Year award. Such events help the schools to work more closely and share ideas and resources. The Schools Library Service also offered storytelling and puppet training to primary school teachers and nursery staff, to support the Boys into Books and Book Ahead gifting (DCSF funded projects administered by the School Library Association).

6.0 Going Forward

The National Year of Reading gave us a thematic focus for each month, and it has generally been agreed that a similar structure would be helpful going forward. This idea has been discussed in our programming and planning group and we intend to move forward with a quarterly theme for libraries, in order to help maintain this momentum. The Reading for Life campaign will also be very important to us for ideas and support, and we will be following its development with interest. We are also currently considering being a partner authority in the Family Reading Matters initiative.

As all of the participants have found the National Year of Reading strategic steering group such a useful forum for ideas and discussion, we have agreed to continue meeting on a quarterly basis. The group will become a working group, will seek to actively involve more agencies, and will be key to implementing the reading strategy. There is more work to be done, in terms of strengthening existing relationships, and developing new ones, but the value of such partnerships has been clearly demonstrated throughout the last year. We hope these positive examples will help to encourage other agencies to join together in the future.

Perhaps the single most exciting initiative to emerge from the pilot is the Emergent Reader Offer. Despite low levels of literacy being a major problem in Wigan, there is no ongoing joined-up approach to supporting developing readers, to support our local basic skills providers. This will be one of the main areas that we intend to build on in the coming months. This initiative will have also complement and feed into other priorities, such as ESOL readers and possibly outreach work with the vulnerable and elderly.

Underpinning all our activity is the need for effective evaluation. We need to have a much more considered approach to events evaluation, which will recognise feedback from participants, partners and our own staff. All of our events need to be planned more effectively, to consider aims and objectives and how they might feed in to the bigger picture, in terms of local and national outcomes. This focus will enable us to consider more closely what we do, who we might work with and who we are targeting. Steps have already been made to put such a

structure in place, but this will be an ongoing process that will require dissemination and possibly additional staff training. The main priority is to develop a process and resources that will be appropriate for all events, rather than having a different approach within each section, which can happen at the moment. We already have a working group in place to consider this issue and will be liaising with other organisations, such as the National Literacy Trust, Booktrust and other authorities, to make sure we have considered all aspects of the process and the most effective way of using the information we gather.

Even though the last eight months seems to have been a whirlwind of activity, it has been a fascinating and enlightening experience for us and it is surprising how much can be achieved in such a short period of time. The importance of the role has already been recognised by the Trust, and as a result the role has been extended for several months, to enable us to start work on some of the initiatives that have already been identified. In order to have maximum impact, the reader development strategy needs input from other quarters, and to be embedded within a number of other strategies. As such, its development will be an ongoing process for some time to come.

The support of Booktrust throughout the pilot has been invaluable and we have learned a great deal from the whole process. We have enjoyed a mutually supportive relationship with our colleagues in Suffolk, and have found the shared experience particularly useful. It has been a challenging, but enjoyable, project that we have been delighted to have been involved with. There is no doubt that it will provide Wigan with a lasting and fitting legacy from the National Year of Reading.



If you would like copies of the supporting documents referred to in the report, please contact Carole Ogden: 01942 486971, c.ogden@wlct.org.

For more information on Booktrust, more about the pilot and Suffolk's experience, please visit <http://www.booktrust.org.uk/News-and-press/Booktrust-pilot-projects>