

**Public Libraries and Every Child Matters:
The difference books, reading and public libraries
make to children, young people and families across Devon**

Introduction

Devon's libraries are changing. Our ambition is to deliver a high quality 21st century public library service, which reaches people of all ages and backgrounds across Devon. We are updating our buildings, investing in our staff, and introducing new ways of working to ensure we can proactively support and encourage take-up by under-represented groups.

We believe that Devon's public libraries have the power to enrich and change peoples' lives. Reading is a fundamental life skill and libraries have an important role to play in cultivating a love of reading. Increasingly, research is demonstrating the value of reading in nurturing emotional literacy; the development of non-cognitive skills and in bringing people together for a shared experience, as well as the core skill of literacy¹. The National Year of Reading has provided a fantastic boost to the profile of reading for pleasure, which we are keen to build on in the future.

This report outlines how Devon's Libraries currently deliver against the Every Child Matters outcomes and signals how we would like to work with the Children's Trust in future to build a public library service which is responsive to the needs of children, young people and families across Devon.

Meeting the needs of children, young people and families

Early Years

Devon Libraries provides a range of activities to encourage parents to introduce their children to books at a very early age. Bookstart, Bounce & Rhyme activities and the DSCF-funded Book Ahead scheme all contribute to our early years work. In 2007/08, almost 20,000 Bookstart packs² were distributed through Devon Libraries. In the same period, over 9,000 children and 7,000 parents and carers participated in Bounce & Rhyme activities across Devon. Through the Book Ahead scheme, with the co-operation of 100 new early years settings connected to us, we aim to reach many more 3-5 year olds.

Our early years work starts with babies, encourages parents to share books at home, promotes reading for pleasure and delivers improved outcomes for children. It also supports:

- **Communication, language and literacy** – Sharing books helps children listen with enjoyment, use language to imagine and recreate experiences and retell narrative in the correct sequence.
- **Creative development** – Introducing children to books helps their creative development and encourages them to use their imagination and communicate ideas, thoughts and feelings.
- **Mathematical development** – By sharing books with them, children are introduced to vocabulary that describes the shape and size of solid and flat objects and are helped to recognise numerals.
- **Personal, social and emotional development** – Sharing books is an excellent way of developing good relationships with adults and peers.
- **Knowledge and understanding of the world** – Books help children to understand and develop respect for their own and other people's culture.

Children

Devon Libraries provides a range of free or low cost events and resources to support school aged children. In summer 2008, over 5,000 children participated in the Summer Reading Challenge, this

¹ OECD (2002) *Reading for Change*

² This includes 6,260 Bookstart Baby packs for babies at their 8 month healthcheck; 5843 Bookstart Plus packs for children aged 2 years and 7683 Treasure Chests for children aged 3 years.

year themed around the Olympics. In addition, around 3,000 children participated in the Booktrack scheme last year.

Young People

Nationally, public libraries have been working hard over the last 3 years to improve their engagement with young people. A national Youth Libraries Board includes representation from the public library sector, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, Department for Children, Schools and Families, The Reading Agency and the National Youth Agency. The Youth Libraries Board has agreed a national offer for young people, which includes:

- Participation in shaping the future design and delivery of library services
- Volunteering opportunities in libraries
- A place to develop citizenship skills and community engagement through volunteering and sharing ideas
- Access to free, safe and welcoming spaces in the local community where they can have their personal space, to meet together and widen their horizons
- Formal and informal learning support
- Relevant and inspiring collections of books, magazines, supported by positive and creative activities
- Reliable, up to date information on education, training and careers opportunities, supplemented by referral services, working with Connexions and other partners.

With a new Young People's Librarian now onboard, Devon Libraries is working proactively to implement the Youth Library offer.

Parents and carers

Family use of public libraries is on the increase due to:

- Family learning activities held in many libraries across the county. Partnership work with Adult & Community Learning has resulted in an excellent take-up during Family Learning Week annually
- A training library, provided by CYPS, is held at Exeter Central Library and is made available to parents, carers and professionals across Devon via the online catalogue and free reservations
- Our developing links with the newly created parenting networks across the county
- Parenting resources called 'Family Matters' at some libraries

We would like to increase the profile of our work with families and hope to launch a marketing campaign next year to promote our services to families.

Contribution to Every Child Matters outcomes

Devon Libraries makes an active contribution to positive outcomes to children and young people in the following ways:

Being Healthy

- Providing a range of health related resources for children and young people
- Working increasingly with the PCT to deliver the 'Books on Prescription' service, where individuals are signposted by their GP to relevant public library resources instead of anti-depressants. Although currently focused on adults, the scheme has the potential to be extended to meet the mental health needs of young people.
- Encouraging children and young people to explore issues of difference and diversity through shared reading experiences, building healthier, more cohesive communities.

Staying Safe

- Playing an important, yet often overlooked, role in keeping children and young people safe in local communities through provision of activities and events.

- Delivering a range of out of school hours activities to meet the ‘things to do, places to go’ agenda. Activities include a growing network of reading groups and creative activities such as Manga workshops, etc.
- Working with Youth Service and other partners to create an environment in libraries where young people feel comfortable, relaxed and safe. In Exeter, the Knight Club Youth Centre in Beacon Heath is developing excellent links with the Central Library and is piloting a collection of library books on-site selected by the young people themselves.

Enjoying and achieving

- Providing one-to-one support to children and young people to encourage reading for pleasure.
- Ensuring Children in Care have a positive introduction to public libraries. In 2007, over 200 introductory packs were delivered to children in care across the county. There is scope to build on this work and to begin to work more extensively with other priority groups, such as young carers and traveller children.
- Providing study support activities for young people. Tavistock Library provides a very popular study support service every afternoon after school.
- Our family learning events help parents & children to learn together in an informal, relaxed environment.
- Providing opportunities for personalised learning, accommodating a range of learning styles.
- Supporting home-educated children, young people and their parents/carers with learning facilities and resources.
- Delivering the Bookstart scheme. Research has demonstrated that Bookstart children are ahead in both literacy and numeracy on starting school and that this headstart is maintained through Key Stage 1. Devon is reaching over 90% of eligible families through its Bookstart initiative.

Make a positive contribution

- Joining the library can be a child’s first act of citizenship opening up access to a wide range of books and resources, including ICT, to support them throughout life.
- Providing volunteering and work placement opportunities for young people in a key community facility. There is considerable scope to extend the accreditation of young people’s volunteering in a library context.
- Encouraging young people to get creatively and actively involved in shaping new library buildings and their stock & services. Opportunities are opening up through our capital programme with new libraries and refurbishments planned for coming years.
- Stimulating input into more general service planning and development. Through a recent workshop with young people in Tiverton Library, we secured feedback from young people on new membership packs.
- Delivering events to citizen engagement. During Local Democracy Week recently, young people from Exeter and Honiton met with local MPs in Q & A sessions at local libraries.

Enjoy economic wellbeing

- Providing access to over 400 computers in public libraries across the county. We would like to build on this, including enabling young people to connect to curriculum materials in local schools and colleges.
- Through providing information and study support facilities, young people have the potential to develop better skills, leading to better employment prospects.
- Encouraging early book sharing through Bookstart supports children to become lifelong learners and will ultimately enhance their future prospects.

Plans for the Future

We already meet the needs of many children across Devon but we know we need to:

- Do more to reach the most excluded children across the county

- Involve young people more creatively in shaping new library buildings. In particular, we have exciting plans for remodelling Exeter Central Library into a landmark cultural building.
- Show the impact of our work with children, young people and families more effectively. Using an outcomes-based approach to evaluation and service monitoring will enable us to clearly demonstrate how we help children and young people.
- Align our work more closely with the wider cultural offer emerging for children and young people.
- Exploit Web 2.0 technology and social networking to reach and engage more young people.

We would welcome discussions with the Children's Trust on partnership work to:

- Encourage early years settings to build proactive links with local libraries
- Explore the potential for CYPs practitioners to promote the value of the public libraries to children, young people and families they work with
- Join up with specialist practitioners to improve links with hard to reach groups, including children in care and Traveller children
- Scope the potential for co-location of services targeting children and young people, particularly in rural settings
- Pilot innovative work supporting family learning and literacy
- Develop new ways of using technology to engage young people
- Sustain and develop innovative work emerging from the National Year of Reading to build a long-term commitment to reading for pleasure in Devon's communities.

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 5th November 2008