

Case Study A – The Views of the Young People

The views of young people are vital to enable us to identify and understand what the Library Services means to them. In order to effectively gauge some of the views of young people five members of the newly established Donegal Youth Council aged between fifteen and sixteen, participated in a consultation session. The consultation covered their opinions and experiences of library and information services to date and also, new ways in which these services could be delivered to best suit their needs. This is a summary of some of their ideas.

Awareness and Use of Libraries

The young people were all aware of their nearest Library, which is based in Letterkenny but did not have any knowledge of other libraries existing in the wider area. The majority of these young people used the library regularly when they were younger and enjoyed organised trips through Primary Schools. However, Libraries did not mean a lot to the young people in our consultation at this stage in their life. Libraries are not an enjoyable social experience for them or for their friends mainly for reasons such as the necessity for them to study books at school for examinations and therefore they want to use their pleasure time in other ways. The majority of young people only use the library for educational reasons e.g. research purposes for school projects. However, one member does use the library on a regular basis for the audio-visual materials it offers. The other young people that participated in the consultation were not aware of this service. One young person said that he would rather buy the book than take it out on loan from a library.

The distance travelled to a local library did not prove to be an issue with the young people and they highlighted that they would not necessarily use it more even if it were easier to access. School Libraries are rarely used by these young people as they find the majority of material and books available are educationally based and not enticing. The young people did not use the mobile library service but would consider using it if they knew more about it in terms of run times and material available etc. Most of the young people found it difficult to get books on loan returned before the due date, the cause of this was mainly habit and even if the loan period was increased this would still be a problem.

Ways to improve the Library and Information Services

All of the young people in the consultation thought the Library and Information services could be improved to suit their particular needs. Their suggestions included:

- Improved study facilities - as school work and study consume so much of their time young people would like to be able to use the library as a study facility and would welcome larger quiet areas with chairs and tables.
- Internet Access is an important factor to these young people for pleasure and for educational reasons but they find this service inaccessible particularly in libraries as a parents' signature is needed if the person is under 18. This can be difficult to arrange in the circumstances so they would like to see other ways to overcome this problem in place e.g. use of software programmes that block out unsuitable websites.
- Greater awareness of the services that libraries offer needs to be created as the majority of young people are unaware of current available services that they would have an interest in accessing e.g. audio-visual services. The audio-visual services could be improved with a bigger and more updated selection of DVDs/CDs available. Again, however, some mechanisms would need to be put in place to protect the usage of these.
- Audio story telling - the young people would like to see novels they are studying on the National Curriculum available on audio story telling facilities so they could listen to these while doing something else e.g. travelling to school or going for a walk.
- The young people felt that library opening hours could be improved with times extended to later in the evening after school and at the weekends.
- More organised events in the Arts Centre would be welcomed by the young people such as particular Artists, Bands and Exhibitions, the young people felt that current events are aimed more towards adults.

Learning Points

It is clear from the above that young people are interested in what the library service has to offer them. Greater promotion of the service is key, as is further thought on how services could be made more relevant and accessible.

Case Study: B The Experience from Northern Ireland

WELB – Background and Profile of Area

The Western Education and Library Board (WELB) is the Local Authority responsible for Education, Library and Youth Services to anyone who lives, works or studies in Fermanagh, Omagh, Strabane, Derry City and Limavady Council Areas in Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland has five Education and Library Boards (ELBs) in total. Within this context, the Public Library Service is funded by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure. The level of funding allocated to each of the Boards is based upon the population density in each of the five catchment areas.

The WELB Model of Service delivery is primarily based upon providing access to information, learning, culture and leisure through printed materials and electronic information (Internet, CD-ROM).

Profile of the WELB area

The WELB covers a wide and diverse area that includes some of the most deprived parts of Northern Ireland. With a population of over 282,055 and including over 63,581 pupils attending schools, and over 106,070 registered library users this represents a considerable population base. There are several community catchments in the area with populations of between 1000 – 1200 people. Each of these villages typically has some limited services such as shops, a GP, Post Office, Schools and the majority would have Community Centres and Youth Clubs. Community Infrastructure is well developed in many areas particularly with access to funds e.g. PEACE II and PEACE I in recent years.

Mobility is a very important issue due to the size of the area that WELB covers, it is necessary for most people to travel to get to work, to study, to shop etc. A good infrastructure of schools is in place but as the population is decreasing in this area ongoing sustainability of services remain an issue. In general, industry is weak and the industry that does exist is mainly centred around Derry. Derry also suffers from a remoteness factor from the rest of Northern Ireland with poor transport links.

Library Service – Serving Rural Communities

The Library Service in the WELB area operates via 16 branch libraries and 12 mobile libraries. There are 9 public and 3 housebound mobile libraries that service over 106 centres such as hospitals, community homes and prisons as well as 270 schools and colleges in the most western counties of Northern Ireland. The current stock levels includes over one million items available for loan or reference and includes 500,000 volumes and audio-visual items being utilised in primary schools in the Board's area. All service points offer a wide range of books and non-book materials, to suit all tastes and ages of readers. In most branches it is possible to lend video and audio cassettes as well as CDs. Currently, DVDs are only available in the Omagh Library where users are charged a fee. This system is working very well and the charge incurred has enabled WELB to invest in this service further.

The WELB serves extensive rural hinterlands that consist of reasonably sized villages. The cost of building new libraries in rural areas such as Castlederg and Strabane amounted to £250,000 and £1.4 million respectively. Typically, a rural library would have one full time member of staff although this may increase depending on the time of day e.g. busier after lunch and in the evening. These libraries would be open to the public for at least 20 hours a week and typically provide the same services as the urban libraries i.e. stock of books, Internet access, CD-ROMs. The book stock is mainly for children so for extensive adult stock it may be necessary to travel to a larger library. Specialised information such as local history is also available in rural libraries. Storytelling is available in all branch libraries but not on mobile libraries.

Mobile Libraries

The Mobile Library is a well-established service in Northern Ireland and is in operation since the late 1960's. The WELB have twelve mobile libraries in the form of public vehicles that are based in four different areas. The length of the stop varies considerably; some areas may have the mobile service for a whole day while others may only have a fifteen minutes stop. Criteria are in place to justify the routes taken, these include the distance from a branch library and the level of social need e.g. high density of older people. Each of the mobiles has only one member of staff, usually male, which may raise issues regarding child protection in future. The service operates on weekdays and Saturday mornings. The Mobile Library users are typically families and older people, the age group that least use the mobile service are between 20 – 45 and these would generally not use a branch library if one was present in their area. This is largely an attitudinal problem and also the lifestyle of this age group rather than their ability to access the service. Currently, mobile libraries primarily provide a book service but in the next twelve months there will be PCs and Internet Access on all mobiles libraries in areas where mobile phones work.

Schools Library Services

A comprehensive library service is provided to all schools and colleges throughout the WELB area. Twice a year, the school mobile visits all primary schools to allow all teachers to choose a selection of books for their pupils. Teachers can also borrow material relevant to the national curriculum.

Dual Use Libraries

WELB have also considered the option of dual use libraries, which are used by the public and school. The WELB believe that this model only works depending on the character and ethos of

the principal of the school, the librarian and the caretaker. With this model the school can become the focal point of the community but again the attitudes and experiences that some people have towards their schooling may leave some of the community not well served, as they do not want to return to an educational environment.

WELB Special Projects

The WELB has several very successful projects/programmes in place to encourage people of all ages to use books and different forms of media for educational and recreational purposes. Examples of such projects include Bookstart, Migration Programme and Libraries without Walls.

Bookstart

Bookstart is a special programme developed to encourage young children to learn. This programme has an educational rationale that promotes language development. The objective of Bookstart is to encourage parents to share books with their children from a very early age by offering free books to every child, and relevant advice to every parent. The scheme works by presenting each parent or carer with a Bookstart pack including: free books, advice on sharing books, information about local library facilities and an invitation to join. Health visitors present the pack during the 7-9 month health check. A recent survey identified that Bookstart babies scored better in 3 out of 4 baseline assessment categories when they started school than non-Bookstart babies. At present, this project is funded by internal sources but from next year it will be funded by the Department of Education.

Migration Programme

The WELB and the Ulster American Folk Park manage a joint programme on Migration Studies. The Centre for Migration Studies is based at the Ulster American Folk Park, Omagh and is a major research centre for the study of emigration comprising of a Research Library and Emigration Database. This specialised library service on the theme of migration offers a wide range of resources and services to students, academics and historians. The Migration Programme employs five staff members funded by WELB.

Strabane Project – Libraries without Walls

The “Libraries without Walls” is a Lottery funded project that promotes Access to IT and Information Skills. This project is in place in eight centres, four in libraries and four in community centres, which is managed by the local librarian e.g. rural areas such as Donemana. An Outreach worker is employed in each of the centres, WELB provide the library staff but they are externally funded.

The WELB use the resources and expertise they obtain to develop innovative projects that are relevant to a particular area and that will instantly generate interest. One such example is the Omagh Bomb Community Archive as follows:

The Omagh Bomb Community Archive

The WELB in partnership with the Health Trust and District Council established the Omagh Bomb Community Archive, which houses world-wide media material on the Omagh Bomb such as newspaper coverage, books of condolences, photos etc. WELB believes that such projects enable libraries to best use their expertise, by applying their skills in a particular way and making information of interest available to the public in different formats e.g. printed, CD-ROM.

Specialist Library Services

WELB are keen to identify and cater for the various information needs of all its users. As a result of this, it provides some specialist library services including:

Business Services

The larger libraries of WELB provide more specialised information for its users. The Derry Central Library is the largest in the WELB area and one of its specialist functions is to provide business information. Local businesses are supported by the provision of a localised information service where files are maintained on larger local industries detailing their company history and range of products. This service is mainly utilised by potential employees, information seekers and students.

Public Access to Information Technology

The WELB have heavily invested in ensuring that each of their libraries contains Public Access PCs. This is supported by a Government Initiative called "The Peoples Network" which is based on three elements as follows: 1) Providing infrastructure i.e. PCs, access to the internet 2) Staff Skills – all staff are trained to the ECDL level and also receive specific training related to the library service that in turn be used to promote reading and accessing information. 3) Creating electronic content/digitalisation and making this material available e.g. local history material, community information.

Media Resource Unit

The Media Resource Unit is based in the WELB Headquarters' in Omagh. This Media Centre provides expertise, guidance, advice, technical support and training in all areas of media production and produces material (video, CD-ROM, print) to be used by the Board and Library itself as well as the general community. Also, the Media Resource Section has the responsibility of posting out a local "Talking Newspaper" on a weekly basis to the visually impaired.

Local Studies

Local Studies provides a genealogical service utilising sources such as the 1901 Census and a wide range of genealogical databases and Internet sources. Advice and guidance is given on using these sources. Census material is available from 1841 to the present.

The WELB aims to ensure that its library services are delivered to all members in the community who, for reasons such as illness or inability, cannot visit their local branch library or use the mobile service. The following are examples of how WELB provide this service:

Magilligan Prison Service

WELB provide a library service to the residents of Magilligan Prison. This comprises of a small library that is staffed three days a week, the Prison Service funds staff but WELB manages the service.

Hospitals, Residential Homes and Day Centres

The WELB provide a library service to hospitals, residential homes and day centres usually in the form of a dedicated room that is provided with book collections. Patients have the option of accessing the books in this room or by trolley service. Due to the nature of the hospitals and the movement of people, this service only reaches a small segment of the population and does not appeal to a lot of people.

Housebound Services

By arrangement, the housebound mobile library will call to the homes of housebound library users by arrangement to allow them to avail of the service.

Potential for Cross-Border Partnership

There exists some potential for WELB and the Library Service, Donegal County Council to work together to explore current and new models of service delivery. The profiles of the areas that they serve are very similar with both delivering library and information services to rural and isolated communities. Some aspects that could be considered include:

Cross-border usage and the proximity of Donegal to the WELB area is an important factor that must be considered, in some cases WELBs services are easier to access by those living nearer the border. Cross-border usage amounts to approximately 5% at present, particularly persons from the Inishowen areas of Donegal. The WELB have an excellent Mobile Library Service in place and this could be used as a model of good practice that the Library services in Donegal could learn from. There may be some scope in place for a Cross-border Mobile Library and the specialist services that a mobile library could potentially offer to target groups could be considered e.g. Specialist Children's Book Bus or services to the Housebound. Northern Education and Library Board provide a Mobile Library Service to Rathlin Island, this model could be examined and compared to the services currently being offered to the Islands off the Donegal coast.

The WELB and the Library Service, Donegal County Council could work together in the process of evaluating new and old libraries e.g. the new library in Strabane could be used as an Evaluation Model. Ideas, good practices and constructive criticism could be exchanged for mutual benefit.

Better mechanisms for developing and delivering library services to rural areas could be jointly explored by the WELB and the Library Service, Donegal County Council, these mechanisms may be able to work in unison with successful programmes already in place e.g. rural transport service, health and community centres etc.

The Future

WELB have some excellent models of service delivery in place that enables them to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service. Unfortunately, Library usage is declining in Northern Ireland as a whole. Therefore, it is vitally important for WELB to identify effective ways of marketing the services they offer in order to entice more people to use the library and information services. Also, WELB are aware that we are living in The Information Age in a society where people have rising expectations so they are continually improving the IT infrastructure they have in place.

Key Success Factors and Learning Points of Interest

- The Mobile Library Service has been well established, and is providing a useful mechanism for the delivery of Library and Information Services to rural areas.
- Specialist projects are targeted to entice interest among non-users in an effective way e.g. businesses, house-bound, hospital patients.
- Infrastructure (roads, community) is well developed to support the operation of this service.
- Lifestyles and attitudes of different age categories must be considered.
- Marketing / publicity of services is key.
- Library use is declining in Northern Ireland as a whole, and cross border usage is not taken into account when budgeting for the provision of services.
- There is less financial support available in Northern Ireland for library services than the rest of UK.
- Rural Library Services have a strong focus on children's books.
- Literacy remains a problem, not yet tackled.
- Government Support to develop the service further through financial commitment is key.
- Partnership / Inter-agency work is effective.
- Services are structured to be as flexible as possible and are well resourced.
- Sustainable Investment in book-stock is needed.

Case Study C

Ardara Parish Council

Ardara Parish Council was established in 1941 and currently has around sixty members. Three members are drawn from each townland and every three years the membership of the Parish Council is replaced. As a representative body for the local community, the Parish Council works to identify local concerns and priorities and develop appropriate solutions to tackling needs. The local population is currently estimated at around 1,500, which is further set to expand with developments in the village. In 1985, following extensive fundraising activity, the Parish Council purchased the local Community Centre. This is a key local infrastructural asset for the community.

One of the initiatives of the Parish Council in recent years has been the establishment of a Community Library in Ardara. Some years ago, Cllr. Charlie Bennett (now deceased) actively lobbied for the establishment of a library facility. Ardara had a public library until 1980, which was based in the Heritage Centre but which has since closed. While there has been a Mobile Library service locally, the nearest Donegal County Council public library facility is located in Glenties.

Ardara Parish Council decided to take the initiative of getting a Community library as this was one of the key priorities identified for the area. The library is located in a room in the Community Centre, and is operated entirely on a voluntary basis. A bottom-up approach to establish the project was used to ensure community support and participation in the initiative. Ardara Parish Council received some stock and initial training for two members of staff to operate the library from Donegal County Council. The Parish Council also received a donation of between 3,500 - 4,000 books from local residents and also some emigrants living abroad.

The level of interest and usage shown to date has been very high. The library currently draws members from Inver, Glenties, Lettermacaward, Meenavelly and the Rosses. There has historically been a willingness to travel to access services in the local area.

The library also has a small I.T based system for the logging of stock, which all staff have received training on. Now, one and a half years in operation, the library has become very successful and is a key local resource.

There are a number of areas which Ardara Parish Council would be interested in developing further:

- Accessing central archives
- Developing audio-visual resources
- Genealogy
- Historical reference sections
- Developing linkages with summer schools and greater involvement of children

- Developing services for third level students
- Support for elderly groups (also audio-visuals)
- Development of linkages with the Rural Transport Service and bringing more people into the library
- Linkages with adult education and Learning courses currently underway e.g. Irish Countrywomen's Association, Women's groups, Evening classes run by the VEC.

Proposals are currently being discussed for the development of a new community facility in Ardara which potentially could house a library component. This is being supported by the International Fund for Ireland. There are also proposals to further improve infrastructure and public transport services, coupled with the introduction of the new Rural Transport Initiative which has greatly improved accessibility.

Learning Points

- Ardara Parish Council feel isolated from Central Library Resources and would benefit substantially from access to stock
- Community involvement and support has been key to the success of the initiative
- One of the biggest obstacles for further development is the lack of suitable premises and staffing to resource and operate the project; the Community Centre at present has no disability access and is not well situated
- Parents have also been centrally involved in supporting the initiative
- The financial implications of establishing and operating a community run library need to be firmly quantified pre-implementation phases. This should include initial set-up costs and ongoing maintenance / running costs
- The Mobile Library Service did not fit well in the area with the needs of particular target groups and especially school children e.g. opening times.
- I.C.T applications at present are limited, as more focused software programmes are needed to best meet the needs of a Community Library
- The Community Library did re-assess opening times to ensure responsiveness to the needs of target groups. This has included opening the library on Saturday evenings to ensure links with many of the community travelling to Ardara for other reasons e.g. classes, shopping.
- The Parish Council has a multi-focus and ensures representation through drawing members from many sectors and geographic areas of the target area. The Community Centre is a key nucleus point for the local area, and has gained local community support in particular.

Case Study D

Aislann Chill Chartha

Aislann Chill Chartha was established in 1999 and since then has been providing a range of community services to the Kilcar area. Aislann has a Board of Directors, which is made up of community workers.

Based in a dedicated community centre (which they own) Aislann provides numerous facilities including a library, cinema/conference room, gym, computer suite (18 computers) with an I.T tutor, sports hall, snooker room, meeting rooms, office space, classrooms, and a naoinra facility. The group also run a number of classes in Computing, Digital Photography, Word Processing, Computer Graphics, ECDL and Irish classes. Services in the centre are bi-lingual as Kilcar straddles the Gaeltacht. Aislann Chill Chartha has a full-time manager. The Centre currently employs a team of five full-time staff and 2 part-time. This includes the manager, 2 fitness instructors, an I.T tutor, a secretary, a childcare assistant and a library assistant. These salaries are funded under the Social Economy Programme. Core funding is not in place and the group recognises the need to leverage grant-aid. There is also a great deal of voluntary input.

The Naoinraí opened 18 years ago and has continued to grow, catering for around 18 children each year since it opened. It is now open four days a week from Monday to Thursday.

The community centre is open seven days a week. Its' opening hours are Monday to Friday 10am – 10pm; Saturday 12noon – 10pm; and Sunday 2 – 7pm. The nearest Donegal County Council public library is located in Killybegs.

Shortly after the library was established, Aislann received a donation of over 9,000 books from local people. The library also purchases around 20 books a month from the Book Club. The level of usage and interest in the library has been very high to date. The local population are estimated to be around 700 with the catchment area extending from Glencolumbcille, Lary to Killybegs.

The library currently has around 200 members most of whom come from the Killybegs area. The majority of these members are children.

The library has an I.T based system in operation, which is used for logging stock. Future development of this system is constrained, as there is currently little spare capacity on the network. The manager of the Aislann hopes to have the library online in the near future. The centre also charges members for use of the Internet but would like to provide a free service to library users. The centre is currently having ISDN Broadband installed. The manager perceives Broadband to be adequate but not optimal.

The library only lends books. Aislann currently charge a membership fee for library usage - €10 adult, €5 children per annum. The group hopes to abolish this fee if it is feasible.

There are a number of areas where Aislann Chill Chartha would be interested in developing further:

- ◆ Aislann is in favour of working more closely with Donegal County Council on stock rotation, particularly if this was undertaken online
- ◆ Allowing public Internet access for library users through a touch screen system is planned. The group also hopes to install a scanning system in the library
- ◆ Aislann would like to abolish fees for library usage if feasible
- ◆ Conference facility could be further developed
- ◆ Need broadband infrastructure
- ◆ Need to leverage grant aid to secure the future of the project
- ◆ Links with the Rural Transport Initiative could be further promoted to develop the library
- ◆ Links with Donegal County Council's mobile library service
- ◆ Development of links with schools
- ◆ The group sees the importance of networking and is interested in entering into partnership with other community groups / facilities in the South West area as a whole.

Learning Points

- Services for elderly in this area who feel isolated are limited
- Members of Aislann Chill Chartha feel isolated from other groups operating in the area such as the CDP's
- Aislann would like to be marketed as part of the Donegal County Council library service
- Need to ensure that there is no duplication of services as Aislann Chill Chartha operates in the same area as the Community Development Project or that there is lack of unity
- The manager of Aislann feels that the agencies who fund the project should do more to market the facility in their own literature
- Marketing and creating awareness of the centre is key. Need to create right perception in the community of what the community centre constitutes
- Outside agencies should help promote the centre by listing it as an available service in their publications or websites e.g. North West Tourism site does not promote Kilcar on its website
- Need assistance to ensure the sustainability of the project
- Cost issues and stock are of huge importance
- Forward planning is key

