Libraries Connected

Libraries: An essential part of local recovery

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The importance of a physical library space

By Carol Stump, President, Libraries Connected

Libraries are an essential part of the local economic, social and cultural recovery from Coronavirus.

Library services are far more than their buildings. During lockdown, libraries expanded their digital and remote offer to continue to provide services to their communities. They've seen a 600% increase in digital membership as well as fourfold increase in the number of ebooks borrowed. These activities support children learning at home, reduce isolation and include exciting new events created in partnership with local artists and arts organisations.

While libraries have rapidly adapted to this new normal, we know that our communities need our buildings and the range of services that we provide in them. Libraries are trusted spaces in the heart of communities and the launchpad for a range of inclusive library activities. There were over 226m library visits in the UK last year[1] and 72% of people in England think that libraries are an essential or very important service to the community[2]. Many of these people depend on libraries as one of the few free and safe public spaces in their communities.

Re-opening our buildings to these visitors will signal the beginning of a return to normal in local neighbourhoods; helping high streets, shops and community facilities to recover from the lockdown. Libraries also provide computers to access local authority and other community agencies such as Citizens Advice as well as support for those who aren't comfortable with IT. But as a driver for inclusion, community cohesion and social mobility, libraries offer far more.

The physical library space is vital for effectively meeting the needs of the most disadvantaged and isolated in our communities.

Through our Universal Library Offers, libraries promote access to reading, training, digital skills, trusted information and cultural experiences to people at every stage of their lives. We've identified five key areas where libraries can play a central role in meeting the needs of individuals and communities who may be struggling to overcome the effects of the Covid-19 crisis. These are:

- Economic recovery with help and training for job seekers and entrepreneurs
- Education support for children and SEND students who struggled to learn at home
- Isolation mitigation for vulnerable groups and to help people to reconnect locally
- Digital inclusion for residents who lack IT skills or have no access to the Internet
- Cultural partnership to help local artists and arts organisations to continue their work.

We, of course, recognise the unprecedented financial situation that most local authorities are facing in the wake of this crisis, particularly in the most deprived areas of the UK. However, communities need libraries to recover. They deliver tangible benefits to the local economy, educational outcomes and the health and wellbeing of all in our communities and especially the most vulnerable. Libraries are needed now more than ever.

[1] Public Library Statistics, CIPFA, 2018-19
[2] Shining a Light, Carnegie UK Trust, 2017

1.   Economic recovery
'Libraries allow for social mobility; they are places of possibility, opening doors in later life for many people for whom school didn't work.' **Darren Henley, Arts Council England**

A. The need
The lockdown caused by the Coronavirus crisis has caused widespread economic problems and triggered unprecedented government action to protect businesses and jobs from being lost. However, despite this package of support, predictions for the future of the UK economy as we emerge out of lockdown are bleak.

The number of people claiming unemployment benefits rose in May 2020 to 2.8 million, according to the ONS[1]. Between March and May, there has been an increase of 1.6 million claimants. This figure is expected to rise as furlough schemes come to an end in October. The Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce said one in three jobs in parts of Britain were at risk due to Covid-19. Job vacancies also fell by 342,000 in March to Mary, the largest quarterly fall since the current series started in 2001.

Some workers are also disproportionally economically impacted by the coronavirus outbreak. Workers who are from a global majority background, women, young workers, low paid workers and disabled workers, have been most negatively economically impacted by the coronavirus outbreak.[1] Further, the OECD[2] predicts a slump in the UK's national income of 11.5% in 2020 – the worst damage from the Covid-19 crisis of any country in the developed world.

B. What libraries do
'Without the BIPC I could never have afforded to see the reports. I have zero budget for those things and yet they are vital lifelines for small businesses.' **BIPC report[3]**

Employment support and training
Local libraries provide a range of facilities and support to help job seekers to find work and improve their employment skills. This includes[4]:
*   86% of library authorities support the unemployed to get online
*   76% support job-searching online
*   71% help with CV writing
*   63% provide short courses to improve IT skills.

Business and entrepreneur support
The Business and IP Centres in libraries are physical hubs where people can come together to learn, network and access free and low-cost information and support in protecting and commercialising a business idea. The service in libraries includes:
*   Free access to high-quality UK and global market intelligence, customer insights and company data (worth over £5m) and intellectual property advice and guidance
*   Free and low-cost one-to-one support, mentoring and training delivered by the British Library and private/public sector business experts and partners
*   Topical and inspirational networking events, featuring role model entrepreneurs
*   Accessible and welcoming spaces with access to PCs, desks and WiFi.

C. The difference libraries make
'I feel my computer skills have really improved, that's why I am confident to attend the group job search sessions now.' **Job seeker, Solihull**

Library users reported the following positive impacts on their learning and attainment[5]:
- 88% of learners said that using the library made them more confident
- 76% said that library use encouraged them to improve their qualifications
- 51% said that using the library put them in a stronger position to get a new job.

Business and IP Centres in libraries over the past three years have achieved remarkable successes[3]. They have:
- Supported the creation of 12,288 businesses, 47% of which were in the North.
- Helped businesses create an estimated total of 7843 new FTE jobs.
- Boosted local economies - the net additional Gross Value Added for Business & IP Centre supported businesses was an estimated £78 million.
- Raised £6.95 for every £1 invested.
- Approximately 10% of all users were unemployed or looking for work when they first received support. Just under half of them are now running their own business (46%) while a further quarter (23%) of them are now in employment.
- 22% of users are drawn from the top 20% of the most deprived areas in the UK.
- Of the users who went on to start a new business, 55% were women (65% in London), 31% were from a global majority background (44% in London) and 17% had a disability.

Plans to extend this success around the country depend on the presence of libraries in local communities to deliver these services.

D. Stoke-on-Trent employment support
'I would not of been able to get my job if it wasn't for the courses you provided.'

The library service provides support for all basic ICT needs and for those who need assistance with every aspect of their pathway back into employment or learning. The team are in a unique position to offer customers digital access, support and information to support basic ICT skills, numeracy and literacy assessments, CV support and job searching.

They also help to address barriers in accessing jobs and training, which for some vulnerable customers with complex needs is a growing concern. This includes working with NHS's Step On to support people who have experienced mental health difficulties, but who are now ready to return to or look for paid employment. As part of their employment support programme, Stoke-on-Trent Libraries provide:
- Volunteer IT buddies – Customers may book up to eight free 1-hour 121 digital support sessions with their IT buddies. From April 2019 to March 2020 volunteers delivered a total of 507 support sessions and provided 237 hours supporting our work clubs.
- Library work clubs – Eight work clubs are delivered each week across the city with an average attendance of 230 attendees each month. Work clubs operate across all their libraries and provide support and information in accessible, user friendly formats.
- 1-2-1 employability support – designed for people who need extra help finding a new job and with their digital skills. Customers may book up to four free 45-minute sessions.
- Virtual college - Library members can complete a range of online courses including construction, hair and beauty, hospitality, IT and social care.

E. References
[1] Coronavirus: Impact on the labour market, House of Commons Library, June 2020
[2] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-52991913
[3] Economic Impact Evaluation of the British Library Business & IP Centre National Network, July 2019
[4] Role of public libraries in promoting and supporting digital participation, CFE for MLA, 2010
[5] Understanding our value: assessing the nature of the impact of library services, City University London, 2010

2.   Education support

A. The need
'There are considerable differences in the levels of pupil engagement in remote learning, particularly amongst the most disadvantaged pupils. This supports a growing evidence base highlighting the risk of the attainment gap widening as a result of this pandemic.' Carole Willis, NFER

Growing evidence of wide disparities in the way schools have set and supported work remotely, as well as children's ability to access online learning while schools were closed, have cemented fears that millions of children are doing little or nothing at all during this time.

A report by the Institute of Education[1] estimated that:
- Two million pupils in the UK – around one in five – did no schoolwork or managed less than an hour a day during the lockdown
- Seven in 10 state school children received no or less than one daily online lesson
- One in five students on free school meals has no computer access at home.

A survey of school staff for the National Foundation for Educational Research[2] found that:
- Four in 10 pupils in England are not in regular contact with their teachers
- A third of pupils are not engaged with their lessons
- Almost six in 10 pupils with special educational needs and disabilities were less engaged with remote learning than their classmates
- Pupils in the most disadvantaged schools are least likely to engage with remote learning with a quarter of pupils have little or no IT access at home.

B. What libraries do
'I would never have become an author if it hadn't been for my local library as a child.' Malorie Blackman

Through the Universal Information and Digital Offer and the Reading Offer, underpinned by The Children's Promise, libraries provide free, local access to a range of IT, learning and information resources and activities to schoolchildren of all ages. These include:
- Free computer and internet access: Libraries are safe spaces for children to access internet and work in an environment that supports learning, especially for those without space and/or internet access at home.
- Homework clubs: These are supervised by staff who provide support to students using both online learning subscriptions that are available through library memberships and the reference books in the library. Some clubs encourage parents to join in, giving them the chance to see what their children are learning at school and how they might help.
- Class visits: Libraries work with schools to offer learning beyond the classroom, inspiring children in different environments and equipping them with lifelong learning skills.
- STEM and code clubs: These are a powerful and enjoyable way to engage communities with computer programming, science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects. They allow young people the opportunity to explore and try new things and to gain knowledge, skills and experience, in innovative and inventive ways.
- Makerspaces: Where people gather to co-create, share resources and knowledge, work on projects, network, build and inspire young people to engage in STEAM activities.
- National reading and learning partnerships: Hosting activities to support the Summer Reading Challenge, National Numeracy Day, British Science Week, Holocaust Memorial Day, Empathy Day, Shakespeare Week, World Book Day and Fun Palaces.

C. The difference libraries make
'Key educational transition points … can be worrying times for children and the library can provide a safe and familiar atmosphere for them.' ASCEL

One of the major strengths of libraries is their ability to support the development of children's literacy skills and to encourage them to acquire a love of reading from an early age. Libraries support children at vital times in their lives such as their transitions to primary and to secondary school and the journey from early teenage years to adulthood. They are also vital spaces for students to access on and offline learning resources and support.

According to research from National Literacy Trust[4]
- Around four in 10 library users on free school meals said they used their library because it was a friendly space and because it helps them to do better at school.
- Almost four in 10 young people who use the (public) library believe that doing so will help them do better at school.

Evidence from a British cohort study found that the combined effect on children's progress of reading books often, going to the library regularly and reading newspapers at 16 was four times greater than the advantage children gained from having a parent with a degree.[5] Libraries are critical to levelling the playing field for some of our most disadvantaged pupils.

D. Somerset Digital skills academy
'I really enjoyed learning what it means to be a graphic designer and it was good to understand how to make a logo using proper design software'.

The Somerset Digital Skills Talent Academy shows how Somerset Libraries foster innovation and develop digital and creative skills with young people in Somerset. Around 20 local pupils from four secondary schools around Taunton were given a valuable insight into the world of creative digital with workshops led by local digital businesses and other partner agencies. Somerset were nominated as finalists in the Digital Leaders 100 Awards 2019 for their work.

The academy offered three-hour, hands-on workshops which gave students an in-depth introduction to some of the latest digital technology, with information on career opportunities, skills development and the chance to try out cutting-edge tech rarely available in schools.

The sessions were delivered in partnership with local businesses and organisations and covered film and animation; 3D Printing and 3D Scanning; Graphic design; Augmented Reality; Coding and Robotics and Virtual Reality. In one session, students were able to link live with the Vice President of tech giant NVIDIA, based in Silicon Valley.

All the schools involved have said that they would like to be involved in future programmes, so that other year groups could benefit. Somerset Libraries also runs the Idea Box to engage young people in STEM. The scheme provides everything you need to run a session in schools or elsewhere and boxes are themed to deliver coding, robotics and 3D design experiences.

E. References
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[3] Children's Library Journeys research, ASCEL, 2015

[4] Public Libraries and Reading: Young people's reading habits and attitudes to public libraries, and an exploration of the relationship between public library use and school attainment, National Literacy Trust, April 2011

[5] Evidence review of the economic contribution of libraries, Arts Council England, June 2014

3.   Isolation mitigation

'Where would you go if you hadn't got the library to come to? Jean, library user

A. The need

Loneliness was already recognised as one of the greatest public health challenges of our time, when the government launched its loneliness strategy in 2018. It has been linked to early deaths and an increased risk of heart disease, stroke, depression and cognitive decline. People who feel lonely are more than twice as likely to develop Alzheimer's (and other forms of dementia) than those who do not feel lonely. It is estimated that between 5% and 18% of UK adults feel lonely often or always.[1]

Studies looking at the psychological impact of patient isolation during the lockdown report high levels of fear, loneliness, boredom and anger. This is especially true for over 70s, many of whom will already be struggling with social isolation and multiple health problems. Even before the pandemic, around 200,000 older people report not having spoken with a friend or member of their family for more than a month.[2]

However, it's important to remember that loneliness can affect people of all ages, including carers, people with disabilities, young people, refugees, the recently bereaved and more:

- Nearly half of disabled people said they were spending too much time alone during lockdown[3]
- Four in 10 young people aged 16-24 say they feel lonely often or very often– more than any other adult age group[4]
- Over half of the interviewed parents with young children in a study of five British towns feel lonely, with parents on lower incomes being particularly affected.[5]
- Loneliness among workers could be costing private sector employers up to £2.5 billion a year due to absence and productivity losses.[6]

B. What libraries do

'I don't feel alone any longer. It's so good to chat to someone and good to have a laugh.' Reading Friends member

Through the Universal Health and Wellbeing Offer, libraries offer a range of creative and social activities which engage and connect individuals and communities, combat loneliness and improve wellbeing. These include:

- **Social prescribing:** Libraries connect people to community groups and services and work through local partners to raise awareness of the local support that's available
- **Early years activities:** These include Baby bounce, rhyme times and stay and play sessions that provide social opportunities for young children and their carers
- **Community groups:** These cater for a range of people including teens, older people, and include activities such as Knit and natter, coffee mornings and reading groups
- **Libraries of Sanctuary:** Libraries are working with City of Sanctuary to welcome refugees and other new arrivals into their community and to foster a culture of inclusivity
- **Support for those with special needs or disabilities:** These include autism-friendly libraries, visually impaired reading groups and sensory equipment in libraries that provide support and connections for carers also
- **Mobile libraries and home delivery services:** These visits are a key source of social interaction for those who have difficulty leaving their homes.

C. The difference libraries make

Libraries are free, safe spaces in local communities which makes the public library network a valuable platform to address the challenge of loneliness and social isolation. A Reading Agency survey in 2020 of over 1,000 reading group members found that[7]:

- 84% feel more connected to other people because of being part of a reading group
- 71% said their mental wellbeing improved because of being part of a reading group.

Of those users of the Reading Well for young people scheme who replied, the emerging findings also indicate a positive impact:

- 96% agreed it offered support in dealing with difficult feelings and experiences
- 87% agreed that the books had offered advice for coping with pressures that could affect mental health and wellbeing.

Mobile library services bring books and human contact to those unable to leave their homes. Some services also loan out iPads equipped with internet access to these patrons and help them to use them. This vital service helps to ensure that those who are at risk of becoming isolated can access the same services and resources as others in the community.

D. Hythe Library Dementia Group

'They also support each other, particularly the carers because once they go away from here they're at home on their own with their partner and they don't see people, they can't go out, they can't have friends, so here is a real lifeline to them.'

Kent Libraries have a strong agenda for combatting social isolation within their communities and are well placed to bring people together in the 99 libraries across the county. They host numerous community groups which are mostly volunteer led, including Talk Time coffee and chat sessions in 79 of their libraries. During the last year there have been a total of 4,282 Talk Time meetings, with 34,655 attendances to these sessions alone.

Outcomes gathered from these groups have shown that they are helping people with mental health problems, as well as people who are new to an area and feeling isolated as the groups provide them with the opportunity to meet new people and find out about the local area.

At Hythe Library, one of their smaller but busy town libraries, a drop-in Dementia Support Group is held every two weeks. The group, run in partnership with Hythe Town Council Dementia Awareness Forum, is extremely popular with people living with dementia and their carers, with 580 attendances over the last year.

Facilitated by volunteers and library staff, the group offers support, guest speakers, signposting to professional help, and a range of social activities, or on occasion just a coffee and chat session for members to socialise and swap information. The group provides a first port of call for those who are newly diagnosed and need practical help, such as helping with paperwork, as well as emotional support at such an uncertain time in their lives.

E. References

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[4] https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/latestnews/2018/loneliest-age-group-radio-4
[5] Loneliness among parents of young children, Coram Family and Childcare, November 2019
[6] The cost of loneliness to UK employers. New Economics Foundation, 2017
[7] https://readingagency.org.uk/news/media/new-survey-reveals-reading-groups-offer-insight-into-different-cultures.html

4.   Digital inclusion

The digital divide is 'fast becoming a defining social justice issue of this crisis.'
Polly Neate, Shelter

A. The need

More than 5 million adults in the UK have either never used the internet or not used it in the past three months, that's one in 10 of all adults. While most non-internet users are of retirement age, 773,000 adults – the population of Leeds – are under the age of 65.[1]

An estimated 9 million (16%) are unable to use the internet and their device by themselves.
Four in ten benefit claimants have very low digital engagement.[2] A third of those with disabilities, some 3.8 million people, had never used the internet, representing half of the 7.4 million adults who had never used the internet.[1]

Digital skills are essential entry requirements for two-thirds of UK occupations, and they pay more than non-digital roles. Overall, roles requiring digital skills pay 29% (£8,300 per annum) over those roles that do not (£37,000 p.a. vs £28,700 p.a.). These occupations account for 82% of online job vacancies.[3]

B. What libraries do

'Before I went along to Stourbridge Library, my digital skills were non-existent' Lynne, Marie Curie Nurse

Through the Information and Digital Offer, libraries offer a huge amount of digital support, training and access to some of the most disadvantaged people in the UK. Services include:

- 26m hours of supported internet access each year on 40,000 PC's[4]
- An estimated 99.3% of libraries offering free WiFi, thanks to DCMS funding[4]
- 91% helping library users to get online via one-to-one and group support[5]
- 76% providing specific support for older people[5]
- 18,426 library staff have completed the Digital Skills training on Learning Pool.

A DCMS study[5] found evidence from England that half of those who do not have access to the internet at home, but use the internet in public places, do so in a public library. Libraries offer a range of activities and resources that include Silver surfer clubs, Internet safety sessions, Tech and Tea events and tablet lending schemes.

The Online Centres Network works to tackle digital and social exclusion by providing people with the skills and confidence they need to access digital technology. Around half of the 6000 UK Online centres are based in libraries and these have considerably higher footfall than those based in other community centres, with an average of 300 users per week as opposed to 40 a week in other centres. Of the two million users annually, three-quarters are counted as socially excluded, and around half have no formal qualifications when they start using a centre.'[6]

C. The difference libraries make

'If you say to someone: Do you want to learn about computers? they will often say no. If you ask: Do you want to speak to your daughter in Australia or find a job?, it's a different matter. It's finding what's important to people.' Charlotte, library team

Sixteen library services in England benefitted from the Library Digital Inclusion Fund in 2016, to develop unique approaches and best practice in delivering basic digital skills. The funding helped identify potential cost savings for government services of £800k per annum across the 16 library service areas. If similar activities were rolled out nationally across all 151 library services in England, they would save

£7.5 million per year. The library services helped more than 1,600 people - including those on low incomes, the long term unemployed, unpaid carers, people with disabilities and those who are housebound and socially isolated - and to deliver in more than 200 library branches in both rural and urban areas, as well as people's homes, day care services, and a variety of community centres.[7]

Digital skill requirements also vary substantially from region to region. For example, data and design skills are important in London to meet the needs of the finance and creative industries, while engineering and advanced manufacturing skills are particularly important in towns like Cambridge and Bristol. This makes library services the ideal delivery partner for tackling the digital divide because they can tailor their offer to meet specific, local need.

D. Libraries NI Digital Citizen Project
'Having been through a lot of health problems and feeling isolated - going along to these digital help sessions has really given me a new lease of life.'

A Digital Citizen has the skills required to use digital technology purposefully and confidently to communicate, find information, purchase goods/services, problem solve and create. In September 2018, with funding from the Department for Communities, Libraries NI launched a project to help people develop and learn the skills needed to become a Digital Citizen.

In Northern Ireland 19% of the population have never used the Internet while a third of the population aged 16 - 65 years have limited or no digital skills.[8] The Digital Citizen project demonstrated that libraries are uniquely positioned between communities and government to help adults improve their safe use of online services.

The project targeted adults in rural areas, areas of significant deprivation, adults with disabilities and retired and older people. Six trainers provided learning opportunities in libraries and outreach locations across Northern Ireland. This team delivered free tailored training programmes as well as group and one-to-one support sessions.

This approach allowed sessions to be delivered, ordered and structured in a way that met the needs of the community and offered a link to their local library where further learning opportunities and resources are always available. A key success was the way trainers established relationships with groups and communities. Between October 2018 and March 2020, over 1400 sessions were delivered in libraries and community locations. Of the people who took part in the project:
- 76% of Go On participants were aware of how to be safe online after the sessions
- 58% of eClinic participants said the sessions improved their confidence using their devices for online information gathering (e.g. Google search)
- 57% said they have been online more since completing the Go On sessions.

E. References
[1] Exploring the UK's digital divide, ONS, March 2019
[2] Lloyds Bank UK Consumer Digital Index 2020
[3] No Longer Optional: Employer Demand for Digital Skills, DCMS, June 2019
[4] Public Libraries: The case for support, CILIP, The Big Issue, October 2018
[5] Evidence review of the economic contribution of libraries (P44), ACE, June 2014
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[7] Library Digital Inclusion Fund Action Research Project Final Report, Good Things Foundation, July 2016
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5. Cultural partnership
'I always thought art was not for people like me, how wrong I was.' Art club participant

A. The need

'Creativity and culture…allow us to reflect and comment on society, to better understand our own lives and those of others, and to occupy a shared space in which we can debate, present alternative views, and discover new ways of expressing our anxieties and ambitions.'[1] Yet people who live in the most deprived areas and those over 75 are among the least likely to have engaged in the arts in the past 12 months.[2]

After the 2008 financial crash, the arts sector saw a significant drop in public funding, business support and philanthropic giving. In response, arts organisations became reliant on revenue from ticket sales, catering and venue hire. This has left the sector at significant risk as most of these private income streams ceased during lockdown.[3] Most recent estimates[4] predict that:

- Creative industries are projected to lose 409,000 jobs and £77 billion in revenue (-30%)
- Music, performing and visual arts projected to lose £11 billion in revenue (-54%) and 57% of jobs (178,000) with theatres, recording studios and venues remaining closed
- Theatre is projected to lose £3 billion in revenue (61%) and 26% of jobs (12,000).

While the £1.57bn funding announcement from DCMS was welcomed by the sector, concerns remain about how much of this money will reach smaller local organisations and artists.

B. What libraries do
'We have become a little family of people who would not have the opportunity to meet each other apart for the love of creating art for ourselves and our communities.' Art club participant

Through the Universal Culture and Creativity Offer, libraries are often the first place that children and young people experience art and culture. Whether it is an arts or crafts session with an emerging artist, a performance or storytelling workshop with an established practitioner or author, a national or regional exhibition touring to local libraries, a live music concert in a city centre library – libraries understand what it takes to facilitate and create a quality and diverse cultural experience, and the lasting impact that has on people's lives.

Our report[5] in 2017 found that library services support the local arts community by providing:

- Space: 94% provide or hire out space for cultural activities
- Activities: Over 80% provide cultural activities at least monthly or quarterly
- Events: Over 80% organised events connected with books such as talks and workshops with authors and writers, at least monthly or quarterly, while over 60% organised events such as film screenings, live performances and concerts at least once a year
- Partnerships: 81% have some form of cultural partnership in place with the arts, museums and galleries sector, 40% have cultural education partnerships and digital partnerships in place and 26% have economic partnerships with creative businesses
- Programmes: Over 80% offered programmes such as Celebrating Shakespeare or Fun Palaces.

In addition, as part of Arts Council England's National Portfolio, six library services have received investment to deliver arts activities, tailored to their communities, from 2018-23.

C. The difference libraries make
'It was also great to see a wide range of people taking the [art] class from children to pensioners of all races and religions.' Art club participant

No other public body has the same reach into and across the UK's diverse local communities, or the networks, economies of scale and flexibility to respond to local needs. The cultural activities and experiences that libraries offer reach people who do not normally participate in arts and culture, helping them to develop a love and appreciation for them. Libraries are perfectly placed to help arts and culture organisations to reach these communities.

Public libraries are also a gateway to a community or region's wider cultural offer, including museums, galleries, theatres, heritage projects, and the creative industries. Regional Bridge Organisations and local Arts Development Officers and Agencies help libraries make the links to arts and culture organisations.

Library spaces are ideal for local arts organisations who are looking to extend their audience reach, develop new practice and continue to produce work when many traditional venues remain closed. This support will be crucial over the coming years to help ensure the survival of much of our cultural ecology.

D. St Helens Art in Libraries
'Working in the library has allowed me to work with an audience that I wouldn't normally engage with.' Artist

St Helens' Library Service has been working with artists to develop, showcase and profile new, developing and established work over the last decade. In 2018, they became one of only six library services brought into Arts Council England's National Portfolio. Crucial to the success of their programme has been the work they have undertaken with local artists. Support has been provided in many ways, including:
- Giving artists and arts organisations opportunities to create, rehearse and stage work in libraries free of charge
- Awarding small pots of money each year to local artists and voluntary arts organisations to create new work
- The development of a mentoring and support programme for emerging artists.

The relationship between libraries and artists is delivers multiple benefits. Libraries reach new audiences through an established network of local artists. Developing the skills, opportunities and career prospects of artists from St Helens is crucial to the development of a new Arts Strategy for the borough. Working with libraries in St Helens enables artists to receive professional support and be more experimental in the work they create.

The programme evaluation shows that artists reached a more diverse range of people by working in libraries with 35% of audiences come from the least engaged Audience Spectrum segments[5]. As we emerge from lockdown, the relationship between libraries and artists is an integral part of ensuring the survival of our cultural institutions in the places we live.

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[6] https://www.theaudienceagency.org/off-the-shelf/audience-spectrum/profiles

6.   Our story/what we've achieved

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