

Commissioning for Stronger Communities and Places

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Introduction

A 2013 research report from Arts Council England found that public libraries are seen as “trusted spaces, open to all, in which people continue to explore and share the joys of reading, information, knowledge and culture”.

During this brief presentation I will take you through our commissioning journey including:

- Libraries as place-based services
- The Universal library Health Offer
- Examples of commissioned services in Devon each with some lessons we have learnt

Background - Devon Libraries as Place-Based Services

1. Public libraries at their best have always been a universal service. Universal in both reach and range. To reflect this, in Devon the public library service is located within the ‘Place’ part of the county council alongside all services serving the whole community ie. Trading Standards and Transport. This is distinct from ‘People’ which includes all services delivering outcomes to individuals ie. Health and Social Care. This distinction is a useful one because...
2. The County Council is moving strategically and rapidly towards becoming a commissioning service as a way to provide personalised services with a reduced budget. This is the first key driver behind commissioning.
3. Within ‘Place’ libraries can build on our traditional core purpose supporting reading, learning and information to connect our universal service with specific outcomes for individuals – and this connection is only possible with commissioning and being commissioned to deliver services. This is the second key driver behind commissioning.
4. In Devon Libraries we are seeing a trend towards delivering additional targeted services to individuals. Now doing this requires funding outside the core library service budget (especially as this budget shrinks). This is the third key driver behind commissioning.

5. Arts-focused commissioning seen with a health, care and well-being focus is about offering services that support independence and recovery in all its forms. This, of course, is not the only way in which the arts make an impact but for the purposes of commissioners it is critical.

Background - The Universal Library Offers



Digital offer



Information offer



Reading offer



Health offer

1. Since 2013 there have been four national universal library offers – reading, information, digital and health. These set a consistent expectation for what library customers can expect from a public library. Say a few words about these.

Which takes us to commissioned services...since 2010 Devon Libraries has been commissioned to deliver services valued in total at over £400,000. Much of this (but not exclusively) has come from other DCC departments.

Three Examples of Commissioned Services

1. Get Into Reading

In this case Devon Libraries have been commissioned from the DCC Prevention budget and in turn commission The Reader Organisation to deliver 12 Get Into Reading Groups in 11 different libraries.



Say a few words about this – **and quote from Exmouth group member:**

“I would just like to thank you Emily, Exmouth library and Devon County Council for the part you are playing in my rehabilitation. It may be just one step, along with a raft of other measures, that are helping me to eventual recovery, but all the same it is a vital one. In view of its importance and relevance to my mental health I hope you don’t mind me copying this email to my NHS psychiatric team responsible for my wellbeing.

Quite simply I am beginning to open my eyes as if in a coma for over forty years. Like a person who is discovering his senses I am becoming aware of the wonders of existence that I once took for granted, but that was cruelly snatched from me by adverse circumstances. A blind man who can suddenly see is much more thankful for the miracle of sight and appreciates everything that much more; so it is with me.

The part you are playing in this transformation is that I picked up a book (‘I am Malala’ by Malala Yousafzai - which seems appropriate) and for the first time for a lengthy period of time began reading, with an awakened thirst for knowledge, enthusiasm, and much anticipated interest;

something I have not done till pre-breakdown times, stretching back to 1972. This might seem like an ordinary event but it makes a significant benchmark in my progress back to health.”

Get Into Reading - Lessons Learnt

- First, with libraries as the ‘honest broker’ and partner, the DCC Prevention budget holder was better prepared to support the work of The Reader Organisation in libraries with substantial funds. As such the library service is in part being commissioned and in part commissioning another organisation to deliver the service – with the trust and reputation of the library service being an ‘anchor’ for the funder.
- Second, the councillor portfolio holder for libraries was invited to a pilot Get Into Reading group meeting in Exeter and was so impressed he told all who would hear including senior commissioners in Social Care that ‘it was the best thing he had done as a councillor.’ This was a key piece of advocacy – so with any new project try a pilot and get the word out there.
- Third, that an ongoing working relationship with a commissioned (ie The Reader Organisation) service has been important to bed the groups into the heart of the library service offer, especially because the arts and literature-based nature of these groups fits into library priorities – this has led to Devon Carers receiving requests for similar groups for carers and receiving Lottery funding to start 12 new groups specifically for carers in libraries also.

- **Devon Public Health Commissioned Services**

This comprises four separate funded projects for the next 2-3 years –

- Reading Well (see the Universal Offers!)
- Six Book Challenge
- Bookstart
- Active Summer – **say a bit more about this**

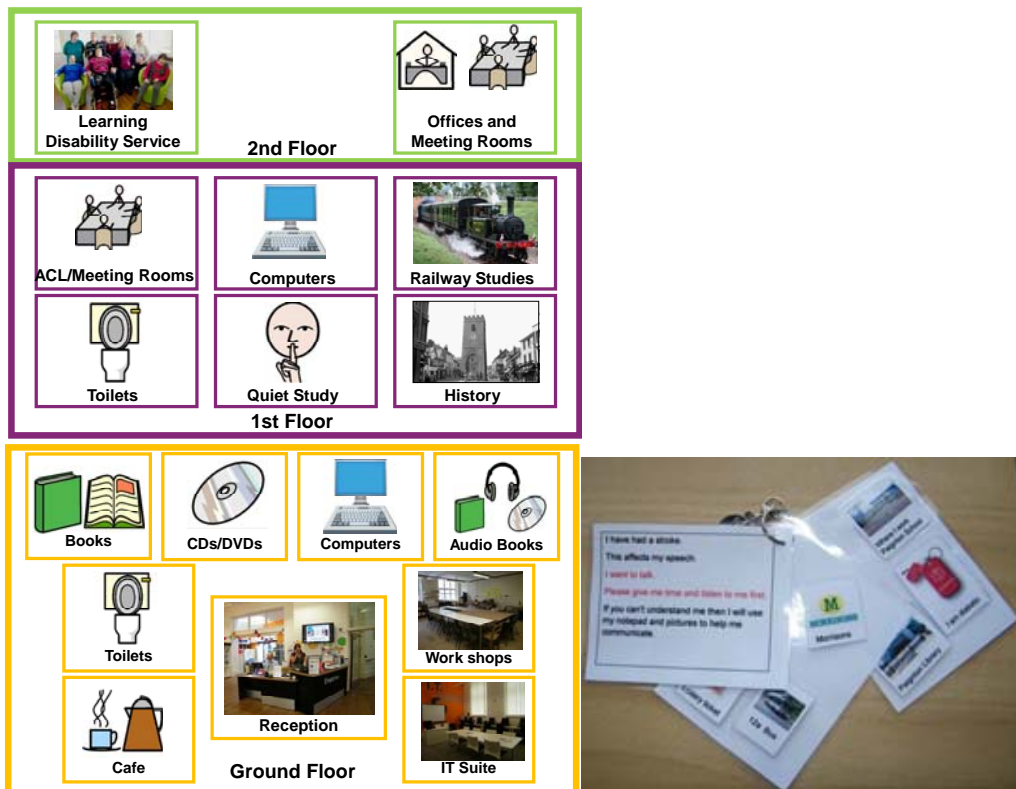


Public Health Lessons Learnt

- Public Health actually came to the library service offering their support based on our 2013 Active Life Active Mind brochure promoting over 300 October events in libraries focused on health and well-being – the lesson from this is do good work, get the message out there and you have a better chance of people approaching you.
- At least in our case Public Health were keen to support activity with existing national support, resources and frameworks as all four of these projects to varying degrees do from The Reading Agency to Book Trust. The bonus for the library service is that in doing this we don't have to reinvent the wheel.

- **Total Communication Now**

This project was commissioned by the 'Communities' part of DCC. Delivery is given by the Speech and Language Therapy Service. **Say a few words about this project.**



Total Communication Now Lessons Learnt

- While a smaller project than the other two, in some ways this demonstrates place-based delivery the best
- First, the library building in Newton Abbot is now a Devon Centre offering a day service to people with learning disabilities as well as being a base for Adult Community Learning classes, café and the library.

- Second, with this service we offer not only a community venue but professional skills to deliver a personal service meeting the needs of people with a communication difficulty, all brokered and hosted by the library service and promoting its capacity to deliver within the town to other place-based services, for instance offering professional skills to leisure-centres.
- ... Total Communication Now brings together what I think is my unifying point which is that in these times of reduced budgets and a growing need, the case for libraries and other arts-focused organisations is primarily based on supporting people before their needs require a more expensive and intensive intervention. This applies to mental health. It applies to physical well-being and fitness. It applies to information and signposting. It applies to social interaction and shared human company. In fact, the Five Ways to Wellbeing...



The 5 ways to wellbeing...

Connect...

With the people around you. With family, friends, colleagues and neighbours. At home, work, school or in your local community.

keep Learning...

Try something new. Rediscover an old interest. Sign up for that course. Learning new things will make you more confident as well as being fun.

be Active...

Go for a walk or run. Step outside. Play a game. Most importantly, discover a physical activity you enjoy and that suits your level of mobility and fitness.

take Notice...

Be curious. Catch sight of the beautiful. Remark on the unusual. Notice the changing seasons. Savour the moment. Reflecting on your experiences will help you appreciate what matters to you.

Give...

Do something nice for a friend or stranger. Thank someone. Smile. Volunteer your time. Seeing yourself, as linked to the wider community can be incredibly rewarding and creates connections with the people around you.

Courtesy of the Devon Partnership NHS Trust

- We know enough about all these things to know that place-based services working together and with specialist organisations, whether arts or health based, can offer this preventative network. This is an evolving journey for Devon Libraries, arts and public services more generally and we have a long way to go. But the path is now becoming clearer

Finally, I have chosen to talk about service-level commissioning and that has been important for Devon Libraries. But I don't wish to leave you without mentioning the value of local staff commitment to innovation and community relationships. Kingsbridge Library is an exemplar of what can be achieved locally almost entirely from staff commitment. Here are their tips for community engagement, being commissioned and the delivery of services in their specific town.

The Kingsbridge Library Experience...

- Network
- Listen
- Persist
- Communicate
- Deliver

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