Social Inclusion:

A Library Perspective

Birmingham, United Kingdom, our city and library service

- Why Social Inclusion ?
- The social inclusion context
- Barriers to public libraries
- What libraries are doing in the UK
- Partnerships
- Challenges to public Libraries
- Examples – Birmingham Libraries

Birmingham: 1 million people

- 2nd largest City in the UK after London
- Growth Manufacturing/Industrial Revolution
- Will be one of the first Black Cities in the UK (majority black population)
- Over half of school population in Birmingham is from Black and minority population

Birmingham Libraries

- Large and complex Central Library , 5000 visitors a day
- Network of 40 Community/branch Libraries
- Housebound service for the elderly and those not able to leave their home
- Prison Service
- Mobile Library Service
- Schools Library Service supplying books and advice to teachers and school librarians
- 700 staff

Why should libraries support social inclusion agenda?

- Public libraries are local, highly respected institutions, 60% of the population of England are Library members (3,600 access points). Changing population, decline use

Public Library and Museums Act 1964 – have a responsibility by law to provide a public library service to all.

In the UK all Public library authorities have to produce an Annual Library plan in 1998 the DCMS concluded "Social inclusion was scored poorly"

DCMS Policy Action Team on Social Inclusion was set-up to look at the issue of widening access to libraries, museums and galleries.

Cabinet Office Social Inclusion Unit was set up to look at social inclusion across all Government Departments.

Context

Social Exclusion linked to problems with:

- Poor educational achievement (e.g. literacy)
- Poor employment prospects (e.g. unemployment)
- Poor Health and mobility (e.g. disability)
- Bad housing (a range of problems)

Barriers that keep people away from libraries

- *Institutional* e.g. opening hours, staff attitude, rules and regulations, charges, book stock policy, facilities e.g. disabled access
- *Personal* and *Social* e.g. lack of basic skills (reading, writing), low income and poverty, lack of permanent address
- *Perceptions* and *awareness* e.g. people who are educationally disadvantaged, people who don't think libraries are relevant to their lives or needs, lack of knowledge of facilities and services, or how to use them
- *Environmental* e.g. difficult access to building, poor transport links, institutional nature of building

Groups such as the following often are described as the socially excluded:

- Children & Young People
- Black & Minority ethnic Groups
- Refugees & asylum seekers
- Travellers
- Children in Care
- Basic Skills/ESL
- People with disabilities
- Elderly
- Unemployed
- Prisoners
- Rural Isolation
- Gay and Lesbians
- People with Mental Health

Libraries should:

- Make services mainstream to specialist groups not always treat them as discreet projects from the rest of the service.
- Consult groups - make sure that these groups are heard through consultation. General forms of consultation not always appropraite.
- Develop new services to meet the needs of new communities.
- Co-locate with others services e.g. voluntary services, citizen advice
- Provide free ICT access including to the internet
- Improve opening hours to meet needs of new communities
- Locate libraries where there is a demand not on historical basis
- Work in partnership with others e.g. Refugee Council

Achieving Social Inclusion

- Identify those socially excluded – for example see list above
- Reviewing current practice – what the library does, is this meeting current needs of community
- Set objectives and priorities – we cannot do everything we need to set priortise to meet current needs and demands
- Develop & train staff to deal with new issues and ways to deliver services and new user groups.
- Implement action plans on how you are going to deal with the new work load and to find out if you are successful.
- Marketing & promotions – promote your services, choice of images. We will see examples later from Birmingham.
- Evaluate & review services to see how successful or otherwise you are.

Partnerships are Key…

The 150 year history of public libraries reveals that the UK library service have adopted only a weak, voluntary and "take it or leave it" approach to social inclusion.

In order to make a real difference we will need to change and work at developing real, sustainable, meaningful and dynamic partnerships with community organisations and groups. This in order to become relevant and help tackle social inclusion in a wider context in communities: libraries cannot do this alone. We need to work and learn from others in a key principle.

Challenges are :

- Sustainability – keep projects and outreach going after external funding runs out.
- Organisational & cultural change - taking the staff and politicians with you.
- ICT environment – keep this free and replaced
- Community ownership – make sure that the community take full ownership of what you are going and why.
- Libraries within the wider framework work with the rest of local government to achieve your objectives.
- Demonstrating the benefits of a new way of working with new groups for the survival of the service.

Key QuestionsHow to use current resources to make a difference

- How to change services
- How to work with partnerships
- How to impact on social change

These are all questions that public library authorities in England are asking and trying solve.

Birmingham Libraries: How we are supporting the social Inclusion agenda

- Membership arrangements – increase access, proof of address?
- Bookstart – outreach and special packs
- Black Families Reading Project – targeted services
- Bangladeshi reading project – outreach/awareness
- Central Library Youth Worker – young people/homeless
- Quality Leaders project – workforce development
- Marketing Campaign – increase awareness of service
- Black History Month – profile of library and resources
- Positive Action Trainees - workforce development
- Membership arrangements – increase access
- Support for festivals e.g Vaisakhi & Eid (promote services to communities)

Bangladeshi Reading Project

- Project Worker appointed
- Training for staff
- Outreach very important with project worker taking a lead, slow process
- Target locations – work intensively and slowly with groups
- Marketing
- Audit Materials what books we have in Bengali where they are from, are these the books that the community want to read.
- New resources visit surrealist book suppliers and research for titles

Black Families Reading Group

- Development worker to co-ordinate the project
- Reading Groups set up in three libraries
- Specialist materials purchased and sought
- Outreach key in terms of recruiting members and consulting the community as well as publishing the programme.

Black History Month

- Support for Black History Month. The month is a show case for highlighting services to Black and minority communities, events such as poetry readings, prompting black history within the city (e.g. archives) and books by black authors, promote relevant web sites.

Bookstart

- Piloted in Birmingham 1992 aim to provide a free book and library card to babies.
- 2002 National scheme to provide every baby a book via library service.
- Has helped reach new audiences as the book is given at the 9 month hearing health check.
- Audio tapes in 9 languages
- Dual language books

Marketing Campaign

- Aim to address the findings of market research – which demonstrate low awareness and negative perceptions of libraries particularly young adults – coupled with a desire for the service to be accessible and welcoming to socially excluded groups.
- Target audience :
  Young adults 16-25
  Disaffected socially excluded groups (particularly Black/African Caribbean)

Key messages for the campaign:

- Libraries are free
- Introduction of ICT (free Internet access)
- Services such as Learning Centres, Job info and Career info in libraries
- Marketing done through, street posters, Billboards, buses, Postcards, radio and press coverage.