Children's Library Journeys

Report

Laura Crossley, April 2015

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Every Child's Library Journey

Libraries are an open door for every child to uncounted opportunities - to have fun, to learn, to discover and to share. They are fundamental to reading, learning, to exploring their identity, and to participating in a society that increasingly values knowledge and depends upon being able to find and use information.

Children learn how to read with help from their parents, family, school and friends. They can harness the potential that libraries offers them if they are given the opportunity to explore, to choose, and to develop their own preferences and interests. The library opens the way for a child to expand their horizons beyond those available within their home and school. It is often a child's first encounter with a place which allows such freedom to explore on their own terms.

Every childhood involves periods of change and upheaval. This can be handled smoothly, but often involves transitions that are disruptive or at worst traumatic. Having places which offer continuity and support through these periods can be instrumental in sustaining achievement or absorbing stress. The child who sees the library as a natural habitat, has such place at hand.

There is something massively important about both the reality and symbolism of having a library membership card. It provides an entitlement to explore the library's collections, drawing on the expertise that librarians offer, and the trusted space the library provides. We know that this simple fact remains in the memory of many children into their adult lives as a precious commodity personal and individual to them. However, we also know that possession of a library card on its own does not create an ability to read, or transform their learning ability.

For this potential to be realised, we know that the child needs encouragement and nurturing based around a series of stages that map out their library journey. These opportunities introduce, extend and refresh the library experience to children (and their carers) at times when they can most benefit. Most of these stages already exist through a range of programmes and initiatives (some local, others national in scope). By pulling these together into a single 'library journey' that every child can enjoy, we can make the most of the energy and commitment of so many organisations. A single library journey would provide a celebration of that shared enterprise delivering the best outcomes for the child.

Contents

1.0 What is the Children's Library Journeys Project?

The ability to read is an essential life skill, and one that it is crucial to develop in early childhood. Most learning of literacy happens in the first 11 years of a child's life, as does the development of a person's love of reading[1]. Children who read well by 11 do better at school, get better exam results and do better in the workplace, and are best placed to support their own children to get a good start in life. If a child does not learn to read well when they are young, they can turn off from education, obtain poor qualifications, and struggle in the world of work[2].

Libraries have a key role to play in supporting children's literacy development and enjoyment of reading. In 2012, The Reading Agency found that nearly a quarter 4-11 year olds who were surveyed said that visiting the library was the action most likely to make them read.[3] A 2014 Arts Council England report discovered that public library users were nearly twice as likely to state that they read outside of class and enjoy reading, and non-library users were almost three times as likely to rate themselves as 'not very good readers'.[4]

In January 2015 a report was released which outlined the key conclusions of the Arts Council England funded Automatic Library Membership pilot projects[5]. The report found that giving children a library card is an important first step in encouraging library usage, but that this in itself does not create active library members; membership needs to be made 'real' through activities in and outside libraries. The report stated that regular interactions, particularly at key points in a child's development from birth, are needed in order to develop library awareness and build participation over time. Following this pilot project, ASCEL (the Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians) was commissioned on behalf of Arts Council England and the Society of Chief Librarians to undertake research to identify what these interactions should be and to create a national framework.

The national Children's Library Journeys framework, which is set out on pages 6 - 10, is the result of desk research and consultation with over 100 library professionals and stakeholders, including ASCEL members and representatives of the Arts Council England, Society of Chief Librarians, CILIP, BookTrust, the National Literacy Trust, The Reading Agency and the Youth Libraries Group.

This report includes the key findings of our research - illustrated by quotes from ASCEL members who took part in the consultation - and sets out the national Children's Library Journeys framework.

> "Libraries are where children discover what books they like best, and become lifelong readers."
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> "Inspiring children, young people and their families to explore libraries and develop a lifelong reading habit means they are more likely to gain good literacy skills and all the social and economic benefits that derive from that."
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> Quotes taken from ASCEL Children's Library Journeys research 2014/15

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[1] Save the Children. (2014). 'Read On Get On' [online], pp.12-13
[2] ibid, p. 6
[3] The Reading Agency. (2012). 'Children say going to the library encourages them to read more' [online].
[4] Arts Council England. (2014). 'Evidence review of the economic contribution of libraries' (June 2014) [online], p. 23
[5] Siddall, A. (2014). 'Automatic Library Membership Pilots Final Report' (January 2014). [online].

2.0 What Did Our Research Discover?

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. By engaging with children when they are very young, and parents-to-be before a child is born, libraries can become rooted in family life.

Libraries support children at vital times in their lives, in particular supporting their transitions to primary and to secondary school and the journey from early teenage years to adulthood. The national Children's Library Journeys offer includes interactions at these key stages, thereby offering continued support to children and their parents/carers that aids literary and emotional development, meeting changing needs, and cementing a relationship between children and libraries that will continue into adulthood.

The Children's Library Journeys offer will, where possible, be complemented by automatic library membership, with library membership being gifted to early years children and Year 7 pupils. The former will help to create active members at a key time in children's development and could be undertaken in partnership with health visitors, children's centres and registrars. The latter, which could be delivered in partnership with schools, will reach children who have perhaps not yet engaged with libraries and will help to begin children's relationship with libraries at a time when they are starting to become more independent.

For a national framework to be implemented successfully, it must take into account and respond to potential challenges – budgetary constraints and capacity, local priorities, the fact that many children do not live near a library and some misconceptions about libraries (e.g. that libraries are quiet places not suitable for children), as well as schools' lack of capacity to take pupils to libraries. These challenges can be addressed by:

- Capitalising on nationally recognised schemes such as the Summer Reading Challenge and Bookstart.

- Working with and extending partnerships with existing local and national partners such as children's centres, health visitors, registrars and schools.

- Ensuring the offer dovetails with broad local authority aims.

- Including a digital offer that can be accessed at home and school.

- Aligning the children's library journeys offer with adult reading activities such as the Six Book Challenge[6].

"The impact of early intervention is immeasurable. Pre-school children learn social and verbal skills during library events, as well as literacy and numeracy skills from book sharing and Song And Rhyme Times"

"Key educational transition points are good times to offer interactions; these can be worrying times for children and the library can provide a safe and familiar atmosphere for them."

"The Summer Reading Challenge is a great way to encourage children of school age to continue to visit libraries. Using the Challenge as a hook, we stage fun activities in all our libraries, which breaks down barriers."

"Volunteering helps to build confidence, encourage independence, and develop social skills."

Quotes taken from ASCEL Children's Library Journeys research 2014/15

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[6] http://sixbookchallenge.org.uk

- Implementing a national marketing campaign that aims to change perceptions of libraries, highlight the importance of reading, and show the importance of libraries at every stage of a child's journey to adulthood (and beyond).

"My daughter is now five years old and in Reception Class at school. I have taken her to the library regularly since she was born. In this culture of instant access, I find it rather charming that the book we're after might not be immediately available but we can reserve things and look forward to getting them next time we come in. As she gets older it'll be lovely when she finds a series of books she enjoys and then search the shelves for more delights."

Library and Information Assistant, Norfolk Library and Information Service

3.0 National Children's Library Journeys Framework

The table below sets out the National Children's Library Journeys framework. Research suggested that the most vital interactions should be with early years children, and, related to this, that it is also crucial to promote the library message to parents-to-be before children are born. Other important stages (in order of suggested importance) were the transition to primary school (aiding school readiness), the transition to secondary school, and interactions with young people and families/parents outside school. Research participants also felt that the offer should be complemented by a national advocacy campaign that promotes libraries and the benefits of reading and library usage at every stage of a child's life (and beyond).

Some of the interactions, such as the Summer Reading Challenge, are already offered by libraries and are available immediately; others, like a digital offer to support children's transition to secondary school, are aspirational.

Age Group	Interaction	Proposed new development	Existing	Reasons for Interactions	Potential Partners	Automatic Library Membership	Local Authority Outcomes that the Interactions will meet
Pre-natal to birth	Parents-to-be will hear about what libraries can offer them throughout their child's life, including the 'Read to your Bump' marketing campaign to promote reading and library usage.	✓ ASCEL to discuss possibilities and ideas with partners such as BookTrust	See note BookTrust	Promote benefits of reading and library usage to parents Support and promote parental involvement in children's and young people's library and reading journeys	NCT Health professionals and Family Information Services BookTrust (has piloted read to your bump activities		Children Learning Better outcomes for communities

Age Group	Interaction	Proposed new development	Existing	Reasons for Interactions	Potential Partners	Automatic Library Membership	Local Authority Outcomes that the Interactions will meet
Pre-school children	Every young child and their parents/carers can enjoy regular Rhymetime or Storytime, and be supported by library staff to choose books and how to get the most from the library *Note: 'Regular' can mean anything from once a month to once a week so that libraries of different sizes and with different capacities can all deliver this interaction; library staff can decide what best suits the needs of their service and their customers.*		✓	Create a reading habit and aid literacy development Support children to develop a love of reading for pleasure Aid school readiness Support child development e.g. potty training, emotional development Support the whole family, including parents	Registrars Children's centres Early years teams Health visitors BookTrust	Recommended	Children Learning Better outcomes for communities

Age Group	Interaction	Proposed new development	Existing	Reasons for Interactions	Potential Partners	Automatic Library Membership	Local Authority Outcomes that the Interactions will meet
Transition to primary school	Every child in Reception class should have the opportunity to visit their library with their school; and be shown how to get the most from their library, with the aspiration to include a digital offer linked to the curriculum.	✓ Exploring the potential for a Digital offer e.g. library app/website/interactive that is skills-based, links with the curriculum and is developed in partnership with School Library Services. ASCEL to highlight good practice examples on website	✓ links with BookTrust's Booktime programme	Support children's transition to school Encourage an independent reading habit Embed links between schools and libraries Catch children/parents and carers who are disengaging, or who are already disengaged, from reading / libraries	Schools and school networks School Library Services		Children Learning Better outcomes for communities
Out of school engagement with primary school children	Every child has the opportunity to take part in reading/learning/digital/creative activities in		✓	Support the development of literacy skills at a crucial time: Most learning of literacy happens in the first	The Reading Agency		Children Learning Better outcomes for communities

Age Group	Interaction	Proposed new development	Existing	Reasons for Interactions	Potential Partners	Automatic Library Membership	Local Authority Outcomes that the Interactions will meet
	libraries Including the Summer Reading Challenge			11 years of a child's life

Provide continuous interactions for families that are distinct from the school offer | | | |
| **Transition to secondary school** | Every child is shown how the library's digital offer can support as they prepare for their new school with the aspiration to develop a library app/website/interactive offer that is skills-based, links with the curriculum and is developed in partnership with school librarians/ School Library | ✓ ASCEL to explore funding opportunities to develop digital offer | | Support children's transition from primary to secondary school | Schools and school networks

School admission services

School librarians

School Library Association | Recommended | Children

Learning

Better outcomes for communities |

Age Group	Interaction	Proposed new development	Existing	Reasons for Interactions	Potential Partners	Automatic Library Membership	Local Authority Outcomes that the Interactions will meet
	Association/SLS's.						
Out of school engagement with secondary school children	Young people have the opportunity to take part in volunteering activities around the year for example linked to the Summer Reading Challenge and Reading Hack, which can lead to accreditation such as Arts Award; Duke of Edinburgh Award etc.		✓	-Research showed that the libraries' offer to teenagers tends to be out of school activities that support academic development, employment and health and wellbeing Support emotional needs (and playing a role in the public health agenda) Support young people's academic development outside the classroom Prepare young people for life after school and the world of work	The Reading Agency National Citizenship Service		Children Learning Better outcomes for communities Skilled workforce

Age Group	Interaction	Proposed new development	Existing	Reasons for Interactions	Potential Partners	Automatic Library Membership	Local Authority Outcomes that the Interactions will meet
				Give young people the opportunity to make decisions about their local library services			
Parental involvement	Parents/carers and their children made aware of the significance of Children's Library Journeys through a funded national library advocacy campaign Journeys programme explaining the benefits of libraries and the support they provide for people at every stage of life. The campaign should include literature and materials	✓		Support and promote parental involvement in children's and young people's reading journeys Provide continuous interactions for families that are distinct from the school offer	ASCEL SCL ACE Reading Charities		Children Learning Better outcomes for communities

Age Group	Interaction	Proposed new development	Existing	Reasons for Interactions	Potential Partners	Automatic Library Membership	Local Authority Outcomes that the Interactions will meet
	local libraries can use, and a digital strand providing information and support for parents.						

4.0 Next Steps and conclusion

Following the creation of the Children's Library Journeys framework, ASCEL's next steps in 2015/2016 will be to:

- Seek sign up from library services and library partners
- Embed the framework within the ASCEL's Children's and Young People's Promise[7] Explore funding opportunities for digital engagement
- Consider opportunities for a national marketing campaign and develop a series of social media messages

Creating and promoting the Children's Library Journey offer aims to ensure that as children become young adults and move into adulthood, they will have benefited from the improved life chances regular library use has been shown to provide – in their achievements, aspiration and their preparedness for the next stages of their life –employment, education, and in their wider lives. During that library journey, their parents and carers will have been supported in undertaking one of the most important roles they will ever play.

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[7] http://www.ascel.org.uk/childrens-and-young-peoples-promise

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