



Youth

Engagement

Network

# Kirklees Libraries



Supported using public funding by

**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**

# Introduction

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**“Taking part improved my confidence.”**

**“I hate to say this, but I’ve really enjoyed it.”**

*Young people at Almondbury Library, Kirklees*

**Kirklees Libraries** are responsible for 24 libraries in the region . Their vision is to utilise partnerships based in the heart of communities and to enrich and positively impact the lives of people across Kirklees. They also focus on providing inclusive and accessible spaces and services.

**ASCEL’s Youth Engagement Network** supports the voices of all children and young people including from all ethnic and cultural backgrounds, who identify as LGBTQIA+ and disabled and D/deaf children and young people, ensuring they are represented in libraries across England.

In this pilot phase, 7 library services tested co-creative approaches with young people aged 11-13, to engage them with the library and give them the opportunity for their thoughts and ideas to be heard.



# Aims

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## The Youth Engagement Network pilot programme:



### Ensures young people have power in libraries

By giving young people a genuine opportunity to influence their local library's services, they build confidence, self-esteem and have fun. Libraries benefit from their insight and ideas.



### Makes opportunities to co-create

Young people co-create activities and shape the services on offer at their local library. They have the opportunity to co-create the national network and influence sector policy and decision-making across the country.



### Gives chances to learn something new

Young people have the opportunity to learn new skills and gain understanding about working in a library. Library teams learn new skills in co-creation and youth engagement, and how to tailor their services to meet the needs of the young people in their community.



### Supports libraries across the country

The national network builds positive relationships between libraries and young people across the country, where open dialogue, continual cyclic feedback and a genuinely inclusive approach are embedded. The libraries taking part were also part of a pilot network, which offered support, ideas-exchange and opportunity to reflect.

# Youth Engagement at Almondbury Library, Kirklees

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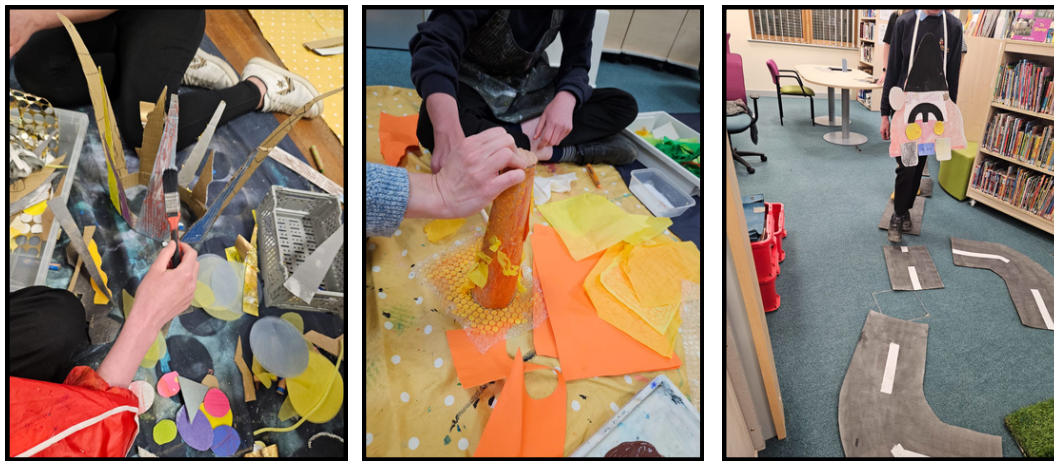


**Almondbury Library** is located two miles outside of Huddersfield. The village has a population of just over 18,000 and the library's convenient location close to a specialist school made it a good choice for this work. The two award-winning librarians leading the work have over two decades of experience of working in libraries between them. They were keen to co-creatively work with young people with SEND and give them the chance to learn new skills and be heard in their library.

- ▶▶▶ **Targeted approach:** The librarians set up an initial meeting with a local specialist autism school. They discussed plans with a KS3 teacher, who recommended four young people who would benefit from the opportunity.
- ▶▶▶ **Ice-breaking and gaining trust:** The librarians then met with the young people. Using a sensory story session as an ice-breaker, they got to know the young people and learnt more about their needs and interests. They co-creatively explored ideas and the young people decided they wanted to create an art-based storytelling project.
- ▶▶▶ **Additional expertise:** To enhance the young people's experience, the librarians commissioned The Children's Art School to support their work. They co-created a flexible project framework based on what had been chosen by the young people.

➤➤➤ **Safe, comfortable spaces:** To ensure the young people felt comfortable at Almondbury Library, the sessions took place when the library was closed to the public. The librarians also made sure the young people had time and space to get creative. A flexible approach was embedded, so the team could be responsive to the young people's needs.

➤➤➤ **Letting young people explore:** Over the course of the project, the young people created different story locations, characters, props and musical instruments. They were supported by the librarians and the creative practitioners, using fun decision-making tools like spinners to create characters and story cubes to choose scenarios.



- **Considerations:** To make the experience as positive as possible for the young people, the librarians:
- Adopted a flexible approach throughout, reviewing their approach after each session to ensure it met the young peoples' needs.
  - Had contingency plans in place, in case additional support was required in any of the sessions.
  - Built a relationship of trust with the young people, giving them freedom to explore their ideas and creativity.
  - Created a peaceful, open space for the young people to fully take ownership of.

# Impact

**“At the start of the project, one student was reluctant to join in due to anxiety. By the end he was asking to go to the library.”**

***KS3 Teacher, Woodley School & College***

## Successes

- ▶▶▶ 6 sessions with the group, with 4 in the library
- ▶▶▶ Young peoples' communication skills improved
- ▶▶▶ Young people felt more ownership of their library
- ▶▶▶ All young people said they felt proud of what they'd achieved
- ▶▶▶ All young people said they had a good time and would return to the library
- ▶▶▶ All young people said they had their ideas included in the project
- ▶▶▶ The young people had time to enthusiastically enjoy reading library books at the end of each session.
- ▶▶▶ Library team developed new ways of working with young people with SEND

## Challenges

- ▶▶▶ Adopting such a flexible approach - for example, one young person felt uncomfortable when a session was moved to the school instead of the library and this needed to be considered for future sessions.
- ▶▶▶ One young person was anxious at the start and this needed to be taken into account with their needs properly considered.

# Recommendations



## Set targets but be adaptable

It's useful to have an idea of what outcomes you and the young people would like to achieve, but recognise that these might change as the work progresses. This is part of the co-creative process.



## Build in time to review

Factor in some time to debrief after each session, exploring what went well and what could be changed for next time. You can even involve the young people in this process.



## Create a comfortable space

Make sure the environment feels comfortable and safe for the young people. It's also important to allocate enough time so they can explore ideas without feeling too rushed.



## Think about communication

Be adaptable in your approach when communicating with young children with SEND. Remember that expert partners such as teachers will be happy to share their knowledge and experience with you.



**“All of the students grew in confidence throughout the project and they were able to use their own ideas to make the stories fully their own.”**

***Creative practitioner, The Children's Art School***

***Study written and published by ASCEL / Kirklees Libraries***