

Children's Library Journeys

Libraries Background Research Report on
behalf of ASCEL

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1.0 Executive Summary

The Children's Library Journeys research, which The Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians (ASCEL) was commissioned to carry out on behalf of Arts Council England and the Society of Chief Librarians, was the result of findings from the Arts Council England funded Automatic Library Membership Pilot (Siddall, 2014). The pilot made recommendations for a Universal Offer that positions the enrolment of each child within a series of staged interactions between an individual and the library service, with regular repetitions of the library message. The aim of this research is to develop a deliverable offer of key public library interactions with children. ASCEL's current Children's Promise will be revised in the light of this work.

The research comprised three elements:-

- Questionnaire: Sent to all ASCEL members during Autumn 2014 which aimed to find out at what stages members feel interactions are important for libraries to offer and why, as well as what interactions these should be. In addition, several respondents provided rich data about specific projects they have undertaken.
- Seminar: On 10 February 2015, 37 library professionals and stakeholders representing a range of organisations including the Arts Council England; Society of Chief Librarians (SCL); CILIP; Youth Libraries Group (YLG); The Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians (ASCEL); BookTrust; The National Literacy Trust; The Reading Agency and representatives of two of the Bridge Organisations came together to discuss what the key interactions should be and potential barriers to implementing a national framework, how the interactions might fit with automatic library membership, and how the impacts of these should be measured.
- Desk research: Drawing on recent advocacy and policy documents, as well as academic research, the report highlights the importance of reading and library usage for developing children's literacy and love of reading for pleasure and all the benefits that these bring, such as increased confidence, higher educational attainment, better wellbeing, and better life chances.

Questionnaire

89 responses were received to the questionnaire. Analysis indicates that library services are delivering a diverse programme of interactions with children, young people and families, which aim to, for example, engage people with the library, increase literacy, develop people's love of reading for pleasure, and improve people's life chances. All questionnaire respondents deliver at least some of these interactions in partnership with organisations such as health professionals, children's centres, literary partners and other cultural partners. Respondents felt that staged interactions have a multitude of positive outcomes for children, young people, libraries, and wider society, ranging from increased literacy skills to better wellbeing, demonstrating the importance of libraries to both individuals and the community.

When asked what the key interactions that come out of this work should be, respondents strongly felt that the most critical life stage at which to engage with children is at pre-school age in order to create a reading habit, aid literacy development and school readiness, and support child development.

Analysis of the responses indicates that respondents felt that the other key times for interactions are:-

- Soon-to-be-parents (pre-natal-birth),
- Key Stage 1,
- Key Stage 2 to 3 transition
- Key Stage 3 to 5 (in particular out-of-school interactions).
- In addition, respondents felt that families should be engaged as much as possible in order to support and promote parental involvement in their child's reading journey.

Seminar

Discussion at the seminar reflected the data that came out of the questionnaire. Participants also felt that it is crucial to engage pre-school children and, related to this, parents-to-be, and also suggested that interactions with children who are transitioning to primary school and secondary school are important. They acknowledged that, due to reductions in staff capacity and in order to keep the national library journeys offer simple and clear, some interactions should be those that are already offered, such as the Summer Reading Challenge. Automatic library membership was recommended for pre-school children and Year 7 children as these are crucial stages in a child's life and development.

Seminar participants highlighted potential challenges in implementing a national Children's Library Journeys offer for example 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

- Piggybacking on current national schemes such as the Summer Reading Challenge.
- Working, and extending partnerships, with existing 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.
- 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).

Recommended national Children's Library Journeys offer

The recommended national Children's Library Journeys offer is below, and is set out in more detail in section 3. The interactions recommended in this report are the result of both the questionnaire and seminar, reflecting the stages at which interactions are felt to be important and bringing together ideas about what the interactions should be. Detailed data from the questionnaires and seminar can be found in sections 5 and 6. The research has

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 outside school and families/parents outside school.

Stage 1: Pre-natal to birth:

- When parents-to-be will hear about what libraries can offer them throughout their child's life, including a 'Read to your Bump' marketing campaign to promote reading and library usage. Delivery by libraries working with: NCT, health professionals, BookTrust

Stage 2: Pre:school:

- When children and their parents can enjoy regular rhymetimes or storytimes, and be supported by library staff to choose books and get the most from the library. Delivery by libraries working with Bookstart, Registrars, children's centres, early years teams, health visitors, BookTrust
- This is the first stage where Automatic library membership is likely to have a significant impact

Stage 3: Transition to primary school:

- When every child in Reception class should visit their library with their school; and be introduced to library services, including the aspiration for a digital offer linked to the curriculum. Delivery by libraries with schools and school networks, School Library Services, BookTrust

Out of school engagement with primary school children:

- When all children have the opportunity to participate in the Summer Reading Challenge or other reading/learning/digital/creative activities throughout the year. Delivery by libraries with The Reading Agency

Stage 4: Transition to secondary school:

- When 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. Delivery by libraries with school admission services, school librarians, School Library Association.
- This is the second stage where Automatic library membership is likely to have a significant impact

Out of school engagement with secondary school children:

- When every child and young person can undertake volunteering opportunities linked to the Summer Reading Challenge and Reading Hack, which can lead to

accredited skills such as Arts Award, Duke of Edinburgh Award etc. Delivery by libraries with The Reading Agency

Parental involvement:

- When parents/carers and their children can experience a funded national library advocacy campaign to complement the Children's Library 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 local libraries can use, and a digital strand providing information and support for parents.

The report also recommends:

- The development of a Children's Library Journeys document to support libraries put the programme into action. The document should include clear justifications for the interactions that can be used to advocate for their delivery and an evaluation toolkit to support library staff to robustly evaluate the impact of interactions on participants and library services. The key parts of the journey will be embedded into the new Children's Promise.
- Financial resource for national co-ordination of the offer, including national long-term evaluation.

2.0 Introduction

This report disseminates the findings of the Children’s Library Journeys research – which has included, a questionnaire for ASCEL members, desk research and a seminar for library professionals and key stakeholders - and recommends what the key interactions should be.

2.1 Automatic Library Membership Pilot

Children’s Library Journeys came out of findings of the Arts Council England funded Automatic Library Membership Pilot (Siddall, 2014). The pilot involved 22 projects in library services which investigated how libraries can best reach babies, primary and secondary school age children (ibid: 3). The study found that giving children a library card is an important first step, but that this in itself does not create active library members; membership needs to be made to be ‘real’ through outreach activities library events and, crucially, an initial visit to a library (ibid: 3). The report stated that regular contact, particularly at key points in a child’s development from birth, is needed in order to develop library awareness and build participation over time (ibid: 3).

Two of the recommendations in the report were:

Arts Council England to:

Scope the opportunity and potential partners to create a national offer framework, akin to the Universal Reading Offer. The framework should position the enrolment of each child in the first of a series of regular interactions. It should integrate with, and build on existing initiatives, to ensure that using a library is a positive overall experience tailored to the different phases of a child’s life (birth/nursery, primary school, secondary school). Through positioning at a national level strong and consistent messages are communicated so that local stakeholders (for example headteachers, registrars) understand how it benefits them to be involved.

Library services to:

Consciously create and articulate the sequence of interactions between individuals and a library service, with regular repetitions of ‘the library message’. Continue seeking opportunities to improve existing working, for example implementing and embedding minimal resource automatic membership schemes, such as Tell Us Once and ensuring the Bookstart gifting process introduces the library offer.

2.2 Children’s Library Journeys Research Project

Following the Automatic Joining Pilot, ASCEL 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 present recommendations for a deliverable but innovative library offer. The aim of the research is to develop a deliverable offer of key public library interactions with children. ASCEL’s current Children’s Promise will be revised in the light of this work.

ASCEL commissioned Laura Crossley, freelance Cultural and Audience Development Consultant, to undertake this report and related research. Research included:

- Collecting and analysing feedback from the ASCEL committee and ASCEL members to find out:
 - What key interactions in a child’s library/reading life are currently being delivered across the country now and what the evidence is to prove they are effective (identifying good practice) and also the role of key partners
 - What key interactions libraries would like to deliver
 - What the barriers are
 - What the gaps are
- Discussions with partner organisations and library staff
- Desk research

The research project included the following phases:

1. Research into existing good practice and what is missing
2. Analysis of this research and telephone interviews with specific authorities
3. Interim recommendations
4. Seminar with library staff and key stakeholders to agree what the key parts of the journey ought to be and what libraries should offer
5. Final report

3.0 The Children’s Library Journey: A Literature Review

3.1 Skills Development

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 (Save the Children, 2014: 12-13). It is important for children to build good language and literacy skills before school and during primary school; children who do not enjoy reading are ten times more likely to have fallen behind at school by age 11 (ibid: 7), and if a child does not read well by age 11 they are far more likely to have poor literacy as adults (ibid: 13). The Institute of Education’s 2014 study, ‘Vocabulary from adolescence to middle-age’, which collected data from 9,400 British people at the ages of 10, 16 and 42, demonstrated that reading for pleasure at a young age led to people having a better vocabulary in their early 40s. Developing a ‘good’ reading habit as a child may lead to people reading throughout their 20s and 30s (Institute of Education, 2014). Furthermore, strong research exists to suggest that pre-school language and literacy experiences are accurate predictors of later educational attainment (Arts Council England, 2014: 23).

Recent national advocacy campaigns - Save The Children’s *Read On Get On* and The National Literacy Forum’s *Vision for Literacy 2025* - recommend the need to tackle literacy at an early age.

The *Read On Get On* campaign recommends the following actions to achieve its goal of getting every child reading well at age 11 across the whole of the UK by 2025:

1. Celebrate the enjoyment of reading in communities
2. Ensure all children have strong early language skills before they start school

3. Primary schools working to support pupils' literacy
4. Support for parents to help them get their children reading.

(Save the Children, 2014)

Vision for Literacy wants to see all children reaching the expected level in early language and literacy development by the age of 5 by 2020 and every 11 year old possessing the literacy skills they need to fulfill their potential in secondary school (the equivalent of a National Curriculum level 4b in reading) by 2025. To reach these targets, the report advocates for four Pathways to Universal Literacy:

- Improve early language and literacy provision in homes and early years settings. The foundation for literacy skills are laid in the first weeks, months and years of life. Young children need to be supported to gain this vital skill and, crucially, their parents must also be given the skills and confidence to support this learning.
- More effective teaching of reading, writing and spoken language skills in schools.
- Universal access to reading materials and programmes is required to ensure that children read for enjoyment (8). Reading for enjoyment increases literacy skills, and is more important than a child's socio-economic background in determining their educational success. Libraries clearly have a key role to play in meeting this aim, providing free access to books, and allowing children to choose what they wish to read.
- Partnerships between education and business need to be enacted to ensure that all school leavers have literacy for employment.

(National Literacy Forum, 2014).

3.2 Literacy and Poverty

The UK is the only economically developed country where 16 – 24 year olds have the lowest literacy skills of any age group in society (ibid: 2). *Vision for Literacy* states that this literacy divide is at the heart of economic and cultural inequalities; up to 40% of the adult population in the UK's most deprived wards lack the literacy skills expected of an 11 year old (ibid: 2). Two in five poorer children left primary school last year without the ability to read well compared with a quarter of all children (Save the Children, 2014: 6-7).

Read On Get On also states that the ability to read is a key tool to get people out of poverty; there is a strong link between low pay, unemployment and poor reading skills. In England, for example, 25% of people who earn less than £10,000 are not functionally literate. 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 (ibid: 6).

3.3 The Importance of Parental involvement

Several studies have demonstrated that parental involvement in children's literacy activities positively affect children's academic performance at both primary and secondary school age

as well as bringing about benefits such as improved cognitive competence and problem-solving skills, better school attendance, fewer behavioural issues at school, and greater enjoyment of school (BookTrust, n.d.: 1). However, the powerful effects of parental involvement go much wider than academic development; studies have shown that children whose parents are involved show greater social and emotional development, for example, increased resilience to stress, greater life satisfaction, better mental health, more positive peer relations and more tolerance (ibid: 2).

Parental involvement has the greatest effect during the early years of a child's development, and the earlier parents become involved in children's literacy practices, the greater and the longer lasting the effects (ibid: 2). Flouri and Buchanan found that parental involvement in their child's literacy practices is a more powerful force than other family background variables, such as social class, family size and level of parental education (ibid: 2).

Parents are key in determining whether or not their children will be library users (Arts Council England, 2014: 22). A study by Clark and Hawkins found that the most common reason for not using public libraries given by 8 – 16 year olds was that their family did not go to the library, and research by Clark and Rumbold found that children from homes where books and reading are valued are more likely to continue to be readers (Department for Education, 2012: 6).

3.4 The Role of Libraries

Libraries have a key role to play in supporting children's literacy development and enjoyment of reading. Indeed, a Reading Agency report (2012) found that 22% of 1,110 children aged 4-11 said that visiting the library was the action most likely to make them read, compared to actions such as someone giving them a new book (9.6%), getting a reading book from school (5.4%), watching a film or TV programme based on a book (3.1%) and reading a book on an iPad or Kindle (1.8%). In addition, libraries probably play a role in increasing literacy skills and supporting children to develop a love of reading; Clark and Hawkins' study found 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' (Arts Council England, 2014: 23). In addition, libraries give children the opportunity to choose a book based on what they are interested in, which is an important factor in developing reading for pleasure (Department for Education, 2012: 6).

Libraries deliver a range of benefits that improve people's lives beyond supporting literacy and giving universal access to free books. They are contributing to the health 'prevention agenda' by increasingly delivering health and wellbeing activities and by promoting reading which has been proven to have mental health benefits (Arts Council England, 2014: 4). Furthermore, libraries very probably contribute to better community cohesion by increasing people's social capital (ibid: 4).

In addition to the benefits above, libraries are supporting digital inclusion by providing important internet access – and with it, access to a global network of learning and information – for free, which is perhaps of particular importance to the quarter of UK residents who do not have internet access at home (ibid: 1). A report by Shared Intelligence (2014) looked at how libraries are currently supporting, and could support, children's digital needs from age 3 - 11. The report recommends that library staff should work directly with primary school age children of all backgrounds, supporting them to explore the role of digital knowledge in different aspects of their lives, and ensuring that children's explorations of

digital knowledge results in positive experiences (ibid: 28). In addition, it proposes that library staff work with parents of pre-school children supporting them to learn about, for example, internet safety and resources that complement the pre-school library offer (e.g. storytelling, craft activities, early years reading, rhyme time songs, websites that support school readiness). Furthermore, it recommends library staff should support parents of primary school age children to, for instance, learn digital skills, find out what digital technologies their children are using, and learn about internet safety (ibid: 28).

Arts Council England's *Library of the Future* paper recognises the value of libraries and advocates for a public library service that collaborates with other organisations to give people access to a wide range of services that meet their needs (Arts Council England, 2013: 4). Supporting reading for pleasure, learning, and literacy should remain at the heart of every library (ibid: 4).

Four priorities to sustain and develop a 21st century public library service (ibid: 5):

1. Place the library as the hub of the community.
2. Make the most of digital technology and creative media.
3. Ensure that libraries are resilient and sustainable.
4. Deliver the right skills for those who work for libraries.

4.0 National Children's Library Journeys Offer

The table below sets out the recommended National Children's Library Journeys offer. Questionnaire data 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, the transition to secondary school, and interactions with young people and families/parents outside school. Discussions at the seminar strongly reflected the data that came out of the questionnaire. Both questionnaire respondents and seminar participants felt that the offer should be complemented a national marketing campaign that promotes libraries and the benefits of reading and library usage at every stage of a child's life (and beyond). The interactions recommended in this report are the result of both the questionnaire and seminar, reflecting the stages at which interactions are felt to be important and bringing together ideas about what the interactions should be. Detailed data from the questionnaires and seminar can be found in sections 5 and 6.

Delivery of the recommendations would support public libraries to meet some of the priorities to sustain and develop a 21st century public library service set by Arts Council England (2013: 5):

1. **Place the library as the hub of the community:** Recommendations include interactions that will support social interaction and creative and cultural activities for community members.
2. **Ensure that libraries are resilient and sustainable:** Recommendations include working with partners to share aspects of service delivery, and playing a role in public health.
3. **Deliver the right skills for those who work for libraries:** Recommendations include the development of a Children's Library Journeys advocacy document and evaluation toolkit.

As consultation with library staff found that the key to putting a universal offer into practice was ensuring that the offer dovetailed as neatly as possible into Local Authority aims, the matrix considers which key corporate outcomes might be met by each interaction.

Age Group	Interaction	Proposed new development	Existing	Reasons for Interactions	Potential Partners	Automatic Library Membership	Local Authority Outcomes
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
Pre-school children	Every young child and 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 <i>Note: 'Regular' can mean</i>		✓	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	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
	<i>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.</i>			Support the whole family, including parents			
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	✓ 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	Schools and school networks School Library Services		Children Learning Better outcomes for communities

Age Group	Interaction	Proposed new development	Existing	Reasons for Interactions	Potential Partners	Automatic Library Membership	Local Authority Outcomes
		examples on website		are already disengaged, from reading / libraries			
Out of school engagement with primary school children	Every child has the opportunity to take part in reading/learning/digital/creative activities in libraries Including the Summer Reading Challenge		✓	Support the development of literacy skills at a crucial time: Most learning of literacy happens in the first 11 years of a child's life Provide continuous interactions for families that are distinct from the school offer	The Reading Agency		Children Learning Better outcomes for communities
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	✓ 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	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
	develop library app/website/interactive that is skills-based, links with the curriculum and is developed in partnership with school librarians/ School Library Association/SLS's.				School librarians School Library Association		
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 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
				<p>the classroom</p> <p>Prepare young people for life after school and the world of work</p> <p>Give young people the opportunity to make decisions about their local library services</p>			
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	✓		<p>Support and promote parental involvement in children's and young people's reading journeys</p> <p>Provide continuous interactions for families that are distinct from the school offer</p>	ASCEL SCL ACE Reading Charities		<p>Children</p> <p>Learning</p> <p>Better outcomes for communities</p>

Age Group	Interaction	Proposed new development	Existing	Reasons for Interactions	Potential Partners	Automatic Library Membership	Local Authority Outcomes
	people at every stage of life. The campaign should include literature and materials local libraries can use, and a digital strand providing information and support for parents.						

The report also recommends:

- The development of a Children’s Library Journeys document to support libraries put the programme into action. The document should include clear justifications for the interactions that can be used to advocate for their delivery and an evaluation toolkit to support library staff to robustly evaluate the impact of interactions on participants and library services. The key parts of the journey will be embedded into the new Children’s Promise.
- Financial resource for national co-ordination of the offer, including national long-term evaluation.

5.0 Analysis of Questionnaire Data

Eighty-nine people responded to a questionnaire that ASCEL sent to members. (The questionnaire has been included in the appendix of this report). Data from these responses was analysed and is presented here. Questionnaire respondents were asked at what stages they feel it is important for libraries to offer key interactions and why, as well as what interactions these should be.

5.1 Impact of Interactions

Questionnaire respondents suggested that children and young people's interactions with libraries have a multitude of impacts on both participants and library services, which mirrors literature on the subject.

Just under a quarter of respondents felt that participants benefit from gaining an enjoyment of reading and developing literacy skills. Other positive impacts on participants are increased self-confidence, better communication skills and social skills, improved attitude to learning and better economic and mental wellbeing. A full list of the impacts put forward by respondents can be found in the appendix. Benefits for libraries included increased active customers and issue numbers, as well as changing people's perceptions of library services.

When asked to state how they measure these impacts, the majority of respondents said that they collect informal feedback or use quantitative measurements - e.g. membership numbers, number of people who attend events, number of issues, number of visitors, number of new joiners. Several respondents said that they evaluate events and projects or undertake case studies and a few utilise the GLOs as a measurement tool. Respondents cautioned that they find it difficult to measure impact, partially because of capacity issues, but also as collecting data to measure social impact and analysing this can be tricky particularly if someone does not have training in this area.

5.2 Interactions that Libraries currently have with Children, Young People and Families

5.2.1 Pre-Natal - Birth

Although it can be difficult to engage with parents straight after a baby is born because their lives are busy, respondents felt that it is important to engage with parents before babies are born, and as early as possible after birth, in order to promote the value of reading and library usage to them. The most common interactions with babies and their parents and carers are delivering, or supporting delivery of, the Bookstart scheme, and running Storytime or Rhymetime activities in libraries.

5.2.2 Birth – 3 Years (Pre-school)

A recent cross-party manifesto, *The 1001 Critical Days: The Importance of the Conception to Age Two Period*, highlights that the first 1001 days of a child's life are crucial to his or her life chances (2014). During the first 1001 days, connections in the brain are created at a rate of one million per second and the brain achieves its optimum development. Experiences at this time shape a baby's brain development and have a lifelong impact on a baby's mental and

emotional health. Furthermore, studies have shown that if a baby's development falls behind the norm in the first year of life, he or she is much more likely to fall even further behind in subsequent years than catch up with peers who have had a better start (ibid: 5) The manifesto asserts that it is crucial to provide early and effective support for parents to help them support their baby's development and raise them in a loving, supportive environment (ibid: 7-8). It calls for renewed support for a baby's first 1001 days from a range of partners and specifically asks that health and early years professionals encourage parents (particularly those from families who need additional services) to read to their children, "as an effective and straightforward way of strengthening early attachment and language development." (ibid: 9).

The majority of the respondents' library services deliver Storytime/Rhymetime activities and engage with the Bookstart scheme via book gifting. In addition, individual library services are undertaking a range of activities, including lending loan boxes that are tailored for pre-school children, baby and toddler groups, craft sessions, 'getting ready for school bags' and toy lending. Libraries are working with children's centres to deliver Bookstart, and several services run outreach activities in children's centres.

5.2.3 Children of School Age

The research has found that libraries are engaging with children of school age in a range of ways, particularly at Key Stage 3.

Library staff visiting schools is the most prevalent method of interaction with Key Stage 1 and 2 children but other interactions vary from service to service. However, several respondents expressed concern that persuading teachers to take pupils to the library or organise a library staff visit to school can be difficult because a visit to the library is not compulsory in the school curriculum.

Engagement with young people in Key Stage 3 and above are much more likely to be out of school experiences rather than in-school, probably because curriculum and timetabling restrictions make in-schools interactions much more difficult to achieve. Although many of these out of school interactions have direct literacy and reading outcomes (e.g. book groups, book awards, writers groups), others focus on young people's wellbeing and readiness for the future (e.g. special interest social groups that encourage social interaction, volunteering opportunities).

5.2.4 Key Stage 1

The majority of interactions with Key Stage 1 children are via class visits to the library. Author visits to schools and Chatterbox groups and book groups are also reasonably widespread methods of interaction. Additional interactions include homework clubs / homework help, themed loan boxes for schools and a book award.

5.2.5 Key Stage 2

Libraries are engaging with Key Stage 2 children in a variety of ways. The questionnaire showed that the most common interaction with Key Stage 2 children is via visits to schools or author visits to schools, but other methods include via Chatterbox Clubs and other book groups, class visits to the library, homework clubs/homework support, themed loan boxes for schools, Arts Award, an annual poetry competition, a film club, and theatre shows in the library.

5.2.6 Key Stages 3 - 5 and Out of School Engagement with Teenagers

Libraries engage with young people via a multitude of methods and for many reasons. Around a quarter of respondents said that their service offers volunteering opportunities and/or work experience opportunities to young people to support readiness for work and, related to this, eight services deliver homework clubs / homework help to support school success. Other reasonably common methods of interaction are book groups and class visits or author visits to schools. Literacy-based interactions include book awards, writers groups, an annual poetry competition and an accelerated reader scheme. In addition, libraries are providing opportunities for young people to learn about things that are of interest to them and to socialise with peers via participation in special interest groups and clubs and workshops and special events.

5.2.7 Family and Out Of School Engagement

The most common method of out of school engagement with children is via the Summer Reading Challenge; every UK library service participates in this scheme. Other interactions are designed to be distinct from the more formal school-based interactions, focusing on informal learning and family fun; the exact activities differ between services but generally focus on holiday activities and special events - including literacy-based activities such as storytelling, author events and book festivals, and craft/making activities, dedicated family learning programmes, and special clubs and groups.

5.3 Key Interactions and Stages

Questionnaire respondents were asked to state the stages at which they feel it is important for libraries to offer key interactions and what these interactions should be.

Respondents were in favour of staged interactions with children and young people at key points in their development in order to forge a continuous relationship with children and provide support at key stages in their lives.

The majority of respondents felt that the main interaction libraries should have with children is at pre-school age because this is the time that libraries can make the most difference to a child's development (which links neatly with the first 1001 days research). An interaction at this life stage was felt to be particularly useful for the following reasons:

- Creating a reading habit and aiding literacy development
- Supporting children to develop a love of reading for pleasure
- Aiding school readiness
- Supporting child development e.g. potty training, emotional development
- Supporting the whole family, including parents
- Opportunity to support the whole family in a holistic way in co-operation with partners such as children's centres.

Respondents felt that other interactions should be:

- **Pre-natal to birth:** Promote benefits of reading and library usage to parents; Support and promote parental involvement in children's and young people's reading journeys
- **Key Stage 1:** Support children's transition to school; Encourage an independent reading habit; Embed links between schools and libraries; Catch children who are disengaging, or who are already disengaged, from reading/libraries
- **Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 transition:** Support children's transition from primary to secondary school
- **Key Stages 3 – 5: Informal:** 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; Give young people the opportunity to make decisions about their local library services
- **Families:** Provide continuous interactions for families that are distinct from the school offer; Support and promote parental involvement in children's and young people's reading journeys

Respondents were asked what the specific interactions with children, young people and families should be. Answers can broadly be categorised into a) literacy/reading interactions, b) activities, c) digital and IT based interactions, with an 'other' category. Suggestions were:

- **Literacy/Reading:**
 - Sessions to build parents' confidence
 - Introduce library staff to parents and children
 - Personal contact by staff
 - Empower children and young people to learn and think for themselves
 - Promoting reading
 - Improved digital offer
 - Events – author talks, reading groups (although takes capacity)
 - Projects – book awards, creative writing, book sharing activity
 - Celebrate national literary events e.g. World Book Day
- **Activities:**
 - Regional events
 - Song and rhyme times
 - Financial literacy
 - Study support
 - Maker-based activities
 - STEM activities
 - Life choices support e.g. careers, volunteering, managing money
 - Homework support (and for parents)
- **Digital and IT:**
 - Information skills development
 - Internet safety classes for families
- **Other:**
 - Arts Award

- Giving children the opportunity to contribute to strategy and policy/youth forums
- Drop-in support sessions for teens
- Universal membership
- Quality promotions and offers
- Train agency staff to e.g. support reading initiatives
- National advertising campaigns
- Rewards
- Birthday cards

Finally, respondents were asked what they felt the impact of these interactions would be on children, young people or their families. Answers fitted into five categories, a) societal benefits, b) literacy / reading, c) academic skills, d) health and wellbeing, and e) soft skills. The most common answers were:

- Creating lifelong readers (literacy / reading)
- Encouraging enjoyment of reading (literacy / reading)
- Bringing families together (health and wellbeing)
- Supporting non-reading families (health and wellbeing)

However, the greatest number of answers were in the 'societal benefits' category, with respondents listing the following impacts:

- Contributing to social cohesion
- Economic wellbeing
- Supporting people to take part in democracy
- Supporting people to develop a sense of community
- Community education
- Creating more equality for reading and learning
- Decreasing deprivation and poverty
- Providing a safe space for teenagers
- Equipping children with knowledge of the library service so that they can use this resource throughout their lives and pass the message about the importance of libraries onto the next generation.

Other impacts were felt to be:

- **Literacy / reading:**
 - Increase children's reading confidence
 - Increase children's engagement with literacy
 - Boost children's reading activity
 - Improve children's vocab and reading fluency
- **Academic skills:**
 - Support improvement at school
 - Support children to increase attainment
 - Support children's academic development
 - Increase children's readiness for school
- **Health and wellbeing**
 - Reduce stress

- Support people to have fun together
- Improve mental wellbeing
- Social and emotional wellbeing
- **Soft skills**
 - Increase children’s confidence
 - Improve children’s social skills
 - Support children’s social development
 - Provide structure that benefits children and families
 - Support children’s independence e.g. allowing them to choose their own books

Children’s Library Journeys promotional messages need to demonstrate the much wider benefits that are gained from supporting the creation of a literate society, as well as literacy benefits.

5.4 Working with Partners

Questionnaire respondents were asked whether their library services are currently delivering interactions in partnership with other organisations. Answers were diverse, suggesting that library services are reaching out across the community to work together with organisations to support children’s reading and literacy.

Many respondents are working with partners to reach pre-school children and their parents, namely registrars, health visitors and children’s centres. Libraries are primarily working in partnership with these organisations to deliver Bookstart, but also to give out membership cards and information about library services, and to deliver joint events in libraries and in partner venues.

A number of respondents are working with literary partners - including authors, ASCEL, National Literacy Trust, Reading Agency, publishers and the Federation of Children’s Book Groups – to deliver interactions such as the Summer Reading Challenge, book groups and author visits to schools.

Many library services are also working with cultural partners, such as museums, heritage sites and Bridge organisations, to deliver events, projects and Arts Award.

Respondents talked of working with schools that support the dissemination of information about library services, youth services that support initiatives for teenagers, volunteering agencies that support volunteer recruitment (for example, for the Summer Reading Challenge), and charities that are partners in joint special projects and events.

Some of the respondents also work with commercial businesses, housing associations, brownies, guides, cubs, scouts, young parents’ groups, parish councils, health and wellbeing coordinators, public health practitioners, dementia services, family services, universities, wildlife organisations and sports clubs. This range of partners is a demonstration that libraries truly are at the heart of their communities working with diverse organisations in order to provide support for members of the community.

5.5 Library Service Capacity and Barriers to Delivery

Questionnaire respondents were asked to state what would be possible in terms of delivering the recommended interactions and what the barriers to delivery are.

Perhaps unsurprisingly in the current financial climate which has seen heavy cuts to library services, respondents felt that lack of budget and worries about future budgets would be the main barrier to delivery. Respondents' biggest concern was that reduced funding is leading to reduced capacity and fewer staff, and that this will worsen in the future as budgets are further reduced. Major concerns were:

- the reduction in specialist staff who are trained to deliver interactions with children, young people and families and alongside this a rise of generic job descriptions meaning that some staff who deliver interactions are not trained which leads to an unevenness in the quality of interactions
- frontline staff are often not trained to do this work, do not have the time to do it, or are reluctant to do it (however, some respondents felt that this project could provide a good opportunity for frontline staff to take an active role in delivering interactions)
- the rise of volunteer-run libraries; volunteers are not necessarily trained and are not always present so can miss instructions or training,
- a lack of capacity to run projects with small numbers of children, such as book groups,
- the inability to deliver interactions outside of libraries,
- a lack of capacity to research and write funding bids, and,
- no time for planning, evaluation and follow-up

Respondents reported that their increasingly small budgets are leading to a multitude of issues that would impact on their capability to deliver interactions, such as reduced resources, the closure of branches, cuts in opening hours, less time to do outreach, and a lack of money to undertake marketing and promotion. One respondent felt that libraries are having to "spread themselves too thinly" and that this is leading to poorer quality interactions. Another said that the lack of knowledge about future budgets is "paralysing libraries"; staff cannot plan for anything or put anything into action because they do not know what the future situation will look like. Respondents also expressed concern that partner organisations' budgets are also being cut, meaning that it is more difficult for them to support delivery of interactions.

There was widespread concern that it is difficult for library services to take part in national schemes if they do not fit into individual library services' objectives. Given this, the children's library journeys offer must be carefully considered so staff can justify delivering these to Local Authorities. Some respondents felt that online resources and a best practice toolkit detailing interactions and their potential impact, with case studies, would be useful practical and advocacy documents. Other respondents felt that a funded national marketing campaign that advocates for libraries that individual services could use would be helpful.

Despite worries about library services' capacity to deliver interactions, respondents were exceptionally proud of what libraries are managing to deliver with the support of excellent staff and volunteers, and were enthusiastic about this project and how they might engage with it.

6.0 Outcomes of Children's Library Journeys Seminar

On 10 February 2015, thirty-seven library professionals and stakeholders representing a range of organisations including the Arts Council England, Society of Chief Librarians, CILIP, ASCEL, BookTrust, the National Literacy Trust, The Reading Agency and the Youth Libraries Group came together to discuss what the key interactions should be and potential barriers to implementing a national framework, how the interactions might fit with automatic library membership, and how the impacts of these should be measured. Participants heard presentations about the findings of the research, and case studies about how four library services are currently working with children and young people. BiblioCommons also attended the seminar as part of their exploration for The Society of Chief Librarians into the potential for a universal digital presence for libraries. This section of the report summarises discussions from the seminar.

6.1 Key Interactions and Automatic Library Membership

The interactions and stages put forward by participants were closely aligned to those highlighted by questionnaire respondents.

- The most important stage was felt to be pre-natal and pre-school in order to get the library message to parents before their child is born – when they perhaps have more time to take this message on board –, to support literary and emotional development of children at a crucial time in their lives, and to embed the reading and library habit at an early age. Participants suggested targeting parents-to-be with a 'Read to your Bump' campaign that highlights the importance of reading to child development and future life chances (which could be part of a broader national marketing campaign and could be promoted in partnership with organisations such as NCT) and ensuring libraries have positive parenting collections. Rhymetimes and Bookstart were felt to be the most appropriate interaction for pre-school children. Rhymetimes are already part of most library's offers, support child development in a myriad of ways (e.g. literacy, movement), offer a social space for parents, and are an opportunity to regularly talk to parents about, for example, recommended books or other library offers for pre-school children. Bookstart is also already offered by many libraries and is a proven way to engage children with books from an early age.
- Participants strongly felt that libraries have a key role to play in children's lives at times of potential difficulty or upheaval, particularly during the transitions to primary school and secondary school. However, it was acknowledged that any offer for schools needs to take into account the fact that some schools might not be able to get to a library - for example, they might be rurally isolated or in a location that is not near a library - or that secondary school teachers in particular may not be able to take pupils out of school to visit a library because of the constraints of the curriculum. Ideally, participants would like the offer to include a class visit for every child in reception but a digital resource could be offered to schools that cannot take this up. A digital offer was also felt to be the most appropriate way to reach pupils in

Year 7. Participants also suggested that ASCEL could commission a piece of work for a creative practitioner to create a toolkit that supports libraries to develop and deliver modern, stimulating class visits. It was noted that libraries could work in partnership with school admission services to promote the library message and encourage parents to join up their children to local libraries. Outside school, it was felt that the library journeys offer should include the Summer Reading Challenge which is already offered by every library service in the country, and volunteering opportunities for teenagers, including volunteering linked to the Summer Reading Challenge and The Reading Agency's new Reading Hack programme.

- Following discussions and case studies presented by four library services (see section 9.3 for further details), participants felt that automatic library membership should be offered to early years children and Year 7 pupils as these are both crucial stages in a child's life and development that can be supported by libraries. Key to ensuring a successful take-up of automatic library membership are partnership working and complementing the automatic membership by also offering an interaction that makes membership 'real'. Automatic membership can be offered to early years children via birth registration forms, children's centre registration forms and, a little later, school admission forms. Health visitors, children's centre staff and registrars all have an important role to play in helping to promote the library message to parents. Automatic membership can be offered to Year 7 pupils via school admission forms. Additionally, it was suggested that, where possible, automatic library membership could also be offered to children who join their local leisure centre, a scheme that is currently seeing success in South Gloucestershire, and that library cards could include other benefits, such as discounts on entrance to leisure centres, travel or leisure activities such as the cinema.

Participants highlighted several potential challenges to implementing a national library journeys offer. The challenges reflected those put forward by questionnaire respondents:

- Decreasing capacity because of budget cuts is a major challenge that needs to be taken into account. However, it was felt that this could be overcome:
 - Piggybacking onto national schemes that library services currently take part in, such as the Summer Reading Challenge, thus not creating extra work for already stretched services and staff. Participants felt in order to be effective, the library journeys offer must be simple - a clear and uncomplicated journey that can realistically be offered by every library in the country.
 - Working with partners (such as children's centres, health visitors and schools) to help promote and deliver interactions. In order to broker partnerships, an advocacy document with case studies that speaks the language of partners, for example, health benefits of libraries and how libraries can support curriculum requirements, would be useful.
 - In addition, participants suggested that financial resource should be put into co-ordinating the offer at national level.
- The national library journeys offer needs to meet, and work within, local authority priorities.

- Negative perceptions of libraries (for example, the perception that libraries are quiet places that are not suitable for children) must be challenged, and parents must be made aware of the benefits of reading and library usage at every stage of a child’s journey to adulthood. Like questionnaire respondents, participants felt that a national marketing campaign would help get these important messages across. This campaign must call the offer a name that is snappy, easily understandable and marketable, and needs to include carefully planned images and role models that resonate with diverse members of the community. In addition to a marketing campaign, libraries must undertake advocacy at a governmental level to promote the benefits – particularly health and economic benefits - of reading and library usage.
- A digital solution is required in order to reach children who are rurally isolated or do not live near a library and children in schools who cannot visit libraries with their class because of the constraints of the curriculum. Participants felt that a digital solution should enhance the reading experience by encouraging children to share reading with family and friends (for example, sharing their favourite books) and featuring recommendations from library staff for different reading levels. It would be appropriate to develop two digital solutions: one for children in school that is potentially developed in partnership with school librarians that includes a skills-learning element that is linked to the curriculum, and one for children outside of school and their families. Participants also felt that, where possible, libraries should offer free computer access to children.
- Participants acknowledged that parents act as gatekeepers until children reach an age when they start to become more independent. Therefore, it is crucial that parents are also supported and encouraged to read and use libraries. Participants suggested that current adult reading activities need to be closely aligned with interactions offered as part of the library journeys offer - for example, they felt that the closing date of the Six Book Challenge prize draw should be changed so that participants are able to undertake the Challenge over the summer when their children are taking part in the Summer Reading Challenge.

6.2 Measuring the Impact of Interactions

Participants felt that it would be appropriate to undertake a longitudinal study of the outcomes of the national library journeys over a number of years in order to obtain detailed evidence about the long-term impact of the offer on children and libraries. This should be carried out at a national level (potentially be a national co-ordinator if resource allows) but can be ably supported by library services that already have excellent national networks as well as key external partners such as health visitors, registrars, children’s centres and schools.

7.0 Conclusion and next steps

Libraries achieve a range of positive outcomes for individuals and communities, but one of libraries’ major strengths is the ability to support literacy skills and support children to develop 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 have an opportunity to become rooted in family life, supporting children’s needs at every stage of childhood. In addition to supporting early years’ children, libraries also have a key role to play in supporting children

at vital times in their lives, in particular supporting the transitions to primary and secondary school and the journey from early teenage years to adulthood. The national library journeys offer must include 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 national Children's Library Journeys offer must be complemented by automatic library membership at key life stages that tie in with key interactions. Automatic membership will ensure that every child has clear opportunities to join their local library and, crucially, associated interactions will encourage active membership. It is recommended that automatic membership is offered to early years children and as children enter Year 7. 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 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.

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 Promise¹
Explore funding opportunities for digital engagement
- Consider opportunities for a national marketing campaign and develop a series of social media messages

¹ <http://www.ascel.org.uk/childrens-and-young-peoples-promise>

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9.0 Appendix

9.1 Questionnaire Sent to ASCEL Members, Autumn 2014



A child/ young person's library journey questionnaire

1: Name

2: Name of library service

3: Contact details

4: What interactions do you currently have with children in your service? At what stages and ages?

5: What do you believe are the impact of these? How does your service measure the impact? E.g. Membership/issues/impact on child?

6: If your service currently work with partners to deliver these interactions can you tell us a little more about this?

7: Ideally at what stages do you think it is important for libraries to offer key interactions? E.g. would it be at children's key development and transition points?

8: What would you ideally like these interactions to be?

9: What impact do you think these interactions would have on a child or family?

10: In terms of delivering these interactions what is possible within your current capacity and what are the barriers?

11: Do you know of any example of best practice from other sectors? (E.g. Museums; Children's Centres; Leisure centres; cultural organisations e.t.c.)

Thank you for completing this questionnaire

Please submit it by 24th October 2014

If you have any queries please email sarah.mears@essex.gov.uk

9.2 Impacts of Current Interactions

- Enjoyment of reading
- Literacy development
- Active membership / increased use
- Self-confidence
- Footfall
- Membership numbers
- Verbal and communication skills
- Issue numbers
- People have fun
- Reading ability
- Social skills
- Raise the profile of the library
- Event numbers
- Develop a reading habit
- Promotion of reading
- Changing perceptions of libraries
- Self-esteem
- Improving attainment
- Increases life chances
- Engagement with libraries
- Development of essential skills and attributes
- Summer Reading Challenge completion rates
- Improves attitude to learning
- Improves reputation and standing of library within local community
- Nurturing citizenship - responsible for their own ticket and books. First independent responsibility
- Relationships with adults based on mutual respect
- Ensuring access to IT
- Provides access to reading for those who otherwise would not access reading material at home
- Babies' cognitive skills
- Developing parent-child bonds
- Health, safety and wellbeing of developing child
- Website hits
- Numeracy skills
- Development of empathy
- Critical skills
- Improve independence
- Imagination
- Concentration
- Encourages vulnerable families to use libraries
- Improved partnerships
- Better relationships with families
- Increases readiness for school
- Chance to have new experiences in a safe environment (e.g. theatre)
- Improving formal and informal education

- Improving psychological education
- Signposting to resources and other agencies e.g. children's centres
- Supports reading for boys
- Increases confidence of young parents in reading to / with their child
- Broadens horizons
- Improving economic wellbeing
- Parents' understanding of child development
- Activities make libraries into creative and vibrant spaces where exciting things happen
- Information skills
- Development of CV/job prospects
- Cultural education
- Develop family interactions
- Teachers invite us back
- Improves adult literacy
- Tolerance of others and their differences
- Improved behaviour
- Interaction with knowledgeable staff
- Improves parenting skills
- Opportunity for parents and carers to meet and share experiences/concerns in a non-threatening space
- Giving children and young people opportunities to meet with peers and knowledgeable, friendly adults to discuss their reading habits

9.3 Key Points from Case Studies Presented at the Seminar

Simon May, Southend Libraries

Southend Libraries wanted to build on Bookstart – which successfully reaches almost all children and parents – and identified that there could be interaction through school and the Summer Reading Challenge, particularly as children start to perceive reading as ‘not being cool’. In response to this, the library service now runs a series of targeted class visits as children move from KS1 to KS2 and from KS3 to KS4. Southend Libraries place an emphasis on interactions that are simple to undertake and that reach as many children as possible.

Kirsten Francis, Norfolk County Council Libraries

Norfolk Libraries work with children’s centres to undertake automatic joining and promote the library message. Children’s centres registration forms include an offer to join the library and this requirement is built into library service’s Service Level Agreement with Children’s centres. Children’s centres also host joint events with libraries and children’s centre staff support the delivery of Bounce and Rhyme Time. Library service staff ensure that children’s centre staff understand the difference library use can make to children so they are keen to promote library membership. Children’s centres and libraries host joint events.

Emma Fisher, South Gloucestershire Libraries

The Libraries West consortium work in partnership with the university and leisure centres to offer local secondary schools the opportunity for young people to automatically become library members when they become leisure centre members. A pilot activity undertaken as part of the Automatic Library Membership pilot project saw a 24% increase in active young library members. The commitment of the whole school was essential for the success of the pilot. Following the success of the pilot, 11 out of 16 local secondary schools now want to

get involved in the scheme. Libraries West want to develop the card into a cultural offer so that it involves other partners as well as leisure centres.

Debbie Hateley, Warwickshire Libraries

Warwickshire Libraries aim to ensure that every primary school child in Warwickshire receives a library card. 131 of 198 local primary schools currently participate in this scheme. Library cards are given to all primary school children from Reception age to Year 6. The library service has a large budget to deliver this project, which has paid for the transfer of the data from school records to library records and the employment of 3 past members of staff to go into schools and take the tickets and deliver a special assembly and publicity material. Children receive a wallet with a named ticket, a flyer with what's on and information for parents. Libraries also run a welcome event.