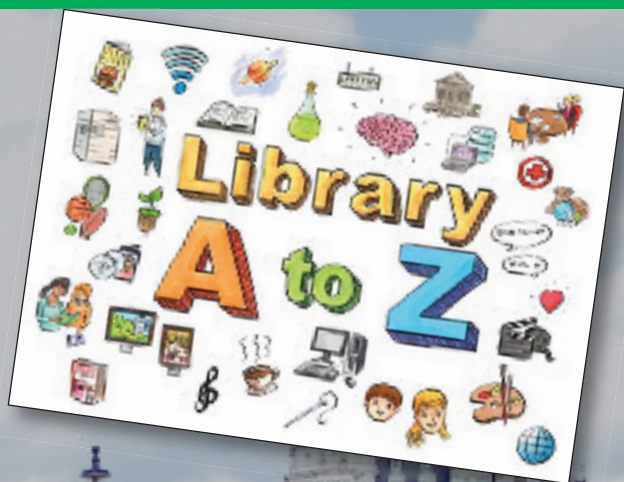


# LIBRARY

## CAMPAIN

SUPPORTING FRIENDS AND USERS OF LIBRARIES

A hopeful court ruling ... great promotional material – look what campaigners can do when they work together!



AUTUMN 2014  
No. 90



PRICE £2.00  
ISSN 0266-6065

## THE LIBRARY CAMPAIGN – AIMS AND OBJECTIVES:

To advance the lifelong education of the public by the promotion, support, assistance and improvement of public libraries through the activities of friends and user groups.



### The Library Campaign

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The following organisations send representatives to attend steering group meetings:

Unison,

Chartered Institute of Library & Information Professionals (CILIP).

## JOIN US!

It costs you little.  
It makes library users  
much stronger.

Our membership form is on  
page 16. Get extra (and larger)  
copies at:

[www.librarycampaign.com/  
join-the-library-campaign/](http://www.librarycampaign.com/join-the-library-campaign/)

Queries: 020 8651 9552 or  
[thelibrarycampaign@gmail.com](mailto:thelibrarycampaign@gmail.com)

### EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETINGS

The Officers and the Executive Committee meet regularly every two months, 1–4pm usually on a Saturday, usually in central London. Campaign members are always very welcome to attend. If you want to come to a meeting contact the Secretary to receive an agenda. We would like to hold more of these meetings in the regions, both to encourage members to come and to help those committee members who have a long journey to London. We have recently met in Lewes, Birmingham and Rotherham. If a local group would like to invite us to meet in their area, we would be delighted to come.

2014 MEETINGS:

Saturday 29 November (Manchester)

### WHO'S WHO?

#### Quick guide to some of the many things relevant to libraries ...

**1964 Act (Public Libraries & Museums Act 1964)** says all local authorities have a statutory duty to provide a public library service, which must be 'comprehensive and efficient' and available to all who wish to use it. Libraries are NOT optional. It gives the Secretary of State power to enquire – and intervene – if standards fall short. These powers have barely been used.

**ACE (Arts Council England)** now has 'responsibility for supporting and developing libraries'. As yet unclear what that means in practice.

**CILIP (Chartered Institute of Library & Information Professionals):** the professional body for librarians in all types of library.

**CIPFA (Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy)** collects figures on library performance and on user satisfaction.

**DCLG (Department for Communities & Local Government):** the central government department responsible for local government. It provides most of local councils' funding. It does not determine how much of it is spent on libraries.

**DCMS (Department for Culture, Media & Sport):** sets central government's policy on libraries (among other things), but does not fund them. It is headed by the Secretary of State, with one minister more directly responsible for libraries (among other things).

**LGA (Local Government Association)** lobbies on behalf of local government. Does some useful work on public libraries, but ultimately sides with councils, not library users.

**MLA (Museums, Libraries & Archives Council):** ACE's predecessor.

**NLT (National Literacy Trust):** charity 'dedicated to building a literate nation' – which includes promoting reading for pleasure. Huge source of information, campaigns and projects.

**SCL (Society of Chief Librarians):** advises LGA on library matters. Does useful work on public libraries, but sticks to 'quiet diplomacy'.

**Unison:** the trade union for most public library staff. Good research and promotional materials.

**TRA (The Reading Agency):** charity to develop reading, especially via libraries. Dozens of projects to promote books, especially to key groups like children, reluctant readers, ethnic minorities etc.



# CONFERENCE 2014

Saturday 22 November, central London

## THIS IS CRUNCH YEAR!

The fourth national conference for public library users, workers and campaigners – backed by a network of national organisations and individual campaigners alongside The Library Campaign: Elizabeth Ash, Campaign for the Book, CILIP, Unison and Voices for the Library.



**Coming soon – two major reports on the future of public libraries, in England and in Wales. And it's time to start making sure that public libraries are a key issue in the 2015 general election. This is your chance to get on board ...**

Come, discuss what libraries really need – and tell the people who can make it happen!

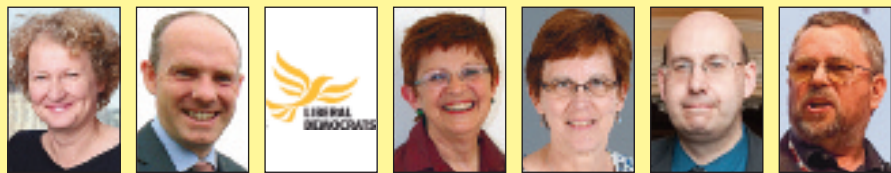
We've invited the key politicians from the three main parties. Network, discuss what they should be told, then tell them direct ... Then get the latest news from two experts who have worked on the Sieghart report and the Welsh government report. Will they make a difference? The real experts are YOU – the people who work and (if necessary) fight to protect our essential public library service.

**Places are limited – advance booking is essential. Places allocated on a strictly first come, first served basis, on receipt of payment.**

**Cost: £20 early bird (unchanged since last year) including tea & coffee breaks and sandwich lunch. £25 after 24 October.**

2014 line-up: **Helen Goodman MP**, (Labour) Shadow Minister of State for Culture, Media & Sport; **Justin Tomlinson MP**, (Conservative) Parliamentary Private Secretary to libraries minister Ed Vaizey; **?????**, Liberal Democrat representative to be announced; **Sue Charteris**, writer of the respected Wirral report and Sieghart panel member; **Claire Creaser**, Director of Loughborough University's Lisu research unit and Wales inquiry panel chair

Plus ... Two more experts on the real situation ... **Ian Anstice**, the librarian behind the award-winning website [www.publiclibrariesnews.com](http://www.publiclibrariesnews.com); **Alan Gibbons**, author, education consultant and Campaign for the Book



**THIS YEAR WE ARE PLANNING THE DAY AROUND ENSURING A FACE-TO-FACE DIALOGUE BETWEEN ALL THOSE BEST-PLACED TO MOVE LIBRARIES OUT OF CRISIS AND INTO THEIR TRUE PLACE IN SOCIETY.**

**SO BE THERE!**

**INFORMATION/BOOKING**

Online booking form: <https://SUFLconf14.eventbrite.co.uk/>  
Information/telephone bookings: 020 8651 9552

**FOLLOW US:**

<https://twitter.com/speakup4libs>  
[@SpeakUp4Libs](https://twitter.com/speakup4libs) #SUFLconf14  
 <https://www.facebook.com/SpeakUpForLibraries>  
[www.speakupforlibraries.org](https://www.speakupforlibraries.org)

**JOIN US AFTER THE CONFERENCE!**  
The Library Campaign is hosting a **get-together, straight after the conference ends, for those who want to network further.**

### THE LIBRARY CAMPAIGNER AUTUMN 2014, No.90

EDITOR: Laura Swaffield

DESIGN & PRODUCTION: Owain Hammonds

CONTRIBUTORS: Christina Burnett, Trevor Craig, Toby Litt, Liz Taylor

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As usual, we've sent you an extra copy of this magazine. Please take the time to pass it on, or place it somewhere people will see it...



## THE LIBRARY CAMPAIGN

maintains a

# FREE LIST

of local

## FRIENDS AND USER GROUPS

with their contact details, on our website.

If you know of a new (or old!) group that is not on our list, please notify: [thelibrarycampaign@gmail.com](mailto:thelibrarycampaign@gmail.com)

# Loud & clear – we're not anti-volunteer!

TLC always opens its AGM and annual meeting\* to all-comers. We want to hear a wide range of views. And we certainly got our wish at the meeting in June ...

When controversy came up, the focus was no surprise. It's the issue that has come to dominate public library campaigns – volunteer libraries.

Other bad ideas, such as outsourcing services to commercial firms, are as yet little used. But the volunteer library idea is spreading like wildfire. And arousing high feelings.

What did surprise was the misunderstandings that were aired. Is TLC against the idea of volunteer libraries? Of course we are. Is TLC against the people who run them? Of course we are not.

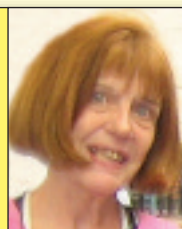
We understand very well the dilemma they have been faced with – run your library, or lose it for ever; take on the building, or see it lost to public use for ever.

There's a further dilemma – if volunteers, in special circumstances, can make a go of their library, it's an excuse for national and local government to claim the idea works well everywhere. And so it spreads as fast – and as accurately – as Chinese whispers. Volunteers understand this danger. So does TLC.

It's a full-scale national disgrace that such choices have been forced on to communities. That's what TLC deplors. Not the volunteers. Nobody has worked harder to keep libraries alive.

## CHAIR'S REPORT

Laura Swaffield  
Campaign Chair



Meanwhile, let's get this in context. The bad news is that just over a third of councils in England are currently trying to push through plans – always against heavy opposition – to turn over half or even more of their branches to reluctant 'volunteers'. The good news is that two-thirds have found better ways to cope with cuts. So far, anyway.

All the same, TLC has been right to focus on this issue in the past couple of years. A main reason is that – astonishingly – nobody else is doing so.

Libraries minister Ed Vaizey has waved away protests. He has ignored TLC's attempts to point out the problems. He is even encouraging the idea (see Campaigner no 88, p.4).

Arts Council England has more or less ignored the issue – apart from publishing a bland, uncritical report that attempted no analysis at all (see Campaigner no 86, p.13).

Most surprising of all, perhaps, is the passivity of the main bodies that represent librarians – SCL (Society of Chief Librarians) and CILIP (Chartered Institute of Library & Information Professionals).

They have done little to stress the value of professional librarians' skills, which are crucial to delivering the full library service people need more than ever. (Unison has done a much better job.)

Meanwhile, the volunteer libraries idea has snowballed – uncontrolled and unexamined. We know of no research that supports the idea with facts or experience, or has analysed the pros and cons.

The sole factual contribution has come from the National Federation of Women's Institutes, which reported that volunteers need a great deal of support – and many aren't getting it (see Campaigner no 86, p.5).

Yet volunteer libraries are now increasingly promoted as the first choice solution for cash-strapped library authorities. They aren't.

This is the most drastic change ever to hit the public library service. Suddenly, the word 'library' can mean almost anything. And it's happening by default, while those who should take responsibility look the other way.

TLC is confronting the issue full-on. For anyone who doubts where we stand, here's a clear statement.

\*[www.librarycampaign.com/tlcs-agm-2014](http://www.librarycampaign.com/tlcs-agm-2014)

NB: all back issues of the Campaigner can be seen on our website.

## TLC and volunteer libraries

**It used to be so simple...** Everyone knew what a public library was. Friends/user groups were keen to supplement their work and help improve a much-loved service. When necessary, they campaigned against closures and cuts. TLC supported their chosen actions.

**It's not so simple now...** Savage cuts, and government neglect, have led to an unprecedented crisis. Untested expedients are being imposed. Most damaging is the uncontrolled rush to force local people to run their own libraries. The word 'library' can mean almost anything. Local people are having to act in ways they have not chosen.

### Where does TLC stand?

TLC does NOT criticise the people who run volunteer libraries. Almost invariably, they

have had to do so under duress. TLC respects their decision to try to maintain a local library service and keep their building in public use. Many do good work, against the odds. We stand alongside them in their efforts to restore their libraries to full function and proper funding.

Volunteers make an invaluable contribution to library services, when working with professional staff to supplement the core library service. TLC fully supports the use of true volunteers.

But TLC strongly criticises the concept of public libraries wholly run by volunteers. It is wrong in principle for any essential public service to be abandoned to volunteers. This is also the view of those who run volunteer libraries.

A public library service is a statutory service which local authorities are legally

obliged to make available, to a good standard.

Any public library is a community library. TLC rejects the use of the term to describe volunteer libraries. There is much evidence that local people do not want volunteer libraries.

TLC does not see volunteer libraries as likely to provide the range and quality of services available in a well-run public library with professional, experienced staff – let alone to maintain the national network of resources and activities that maximises public libraries' value.

Dumping libraries on to volunteers is unfair to the volunteers and unfair to the communities served. This is especially true for the deprived communities that need public libraries most.

TLC cannot act as a support/advisory service on how to run a volunteer library.

# Volunteer libraries – the dilemma

Trevor Craig untangles a complicated debate ...



■ Trevor Craig

The Library Campaign AGM and open meeting (14 June) felt a bit fractious, and there were some differing views about volunteer libraries. I think the triumph of the day was me working out how to switch on the air conditioning.

One of the contentious questions was – should we help library users who in the face of closure are trying to save their library by volunteering?

One speaker was of the view that we have to support them, and advise them on how to run a volunteer library, otherwise we're responsible for the library failing/closing. Given the example of Brent campaigners trying to get their foot back in the door of their closed library, to see if they can reverse the decision of Brent council by showing there is a need for a library, then on the surface the point is valid and straightforward. If we're about saving libraries we should support volunteer run libraries. I've paraphrased but I think this was the gist of his point.

I disagree, for a few reasons.

There are so many different configurations of volunteer library out there. Nobody really knows what

Alternative resources exist, however inadequate. TLC works hard to draw attention to the problems volunteer libraries face, and the cynical failure of local and national government to acknowledge – let alone address – these problems.

TLC concentrates its limited resources on supporting those who work to retain a full public library service. The volunteer option is not being pursued by most library authorities. TLC works to publicise the many alternative ways to make savings without damaging the branch network.

TLC strongly criticises the way volunteer libraries have been encouraged to proliferate with no attempt to carry out research on what support they need, or whether they are viable at all. TLC strongly criticises the claims made by national and local government that volunteer libraries are a valid way to provide a full library service. This is not proved.

works and what doesn't. It seems from the example in Bucks, if you have a library in a affluent area with lots of wealthy retired professionals then the volunteer library has a chance. If you're in a deprived borough then it is less likely it will succeed.

How can I, or The Library Campaign, or anyone else, claim to know what is best to advise the poor souls trying to save their library?

Locality [government-funded agency to encourage 'transfer of assets' to the community – see Campaigner no 88, page 7] is getting large amounts of taxpayer money and has set up some resources to help.

So has Little Chalfont Community Library in Bucks [with a small grant from the Cabinet Office].

If either of these aren't providing enough support, their users should be complaining to their local authority, DCLG and DCMS. It is the ideological solution of these government bodies – not mine.

I know Jim Brooks from Little Chalfont thinks volunteer libraries aren't a great idea, but he chooses to help others put in this difficult position. While I disagree with his choice, I won't criticise him for it. It's a horrible choice to have to make, and we're all entitled to do what we think best.

The other point is, I shouldn't be made to feel guilty or feel responsible if I choose, rather than to help, to devote my limited free time to campaign against the actual concept of volunteer libraries – which nearly all library users/campaigners (but not all in the profession!) are against.

The blame lies with your local councillor, cabinet officer for libraries, the council officers and the national government for failing us – and particularly Ed Vaizey, the libraries minister.

Despite still being one of the richest countries in the world they tell us that library managers, the lowest paid, in the smaller branch and rural libraries, are a luxury that cannot be afforded.

But we can still afford millions (£2 million in Oxfordshire, in fact) on self service machines, and giant vanity PFI libraries in the big cities with websites alone that cost millions.



My final point – I said something along these lines in the meeting – is this, and it's a harsh reality. If volunteer libraries are seen as succeeding (even if they aren't) then this will be the de facto choice for councils looking to make more easy cuts.

We've seen what a meal they've made of the Bucks example. They are quiet about the failures. Walcot in Swindon I would put forward as an example of this [see Campaigner no 87, page 6]. I'm sure there are many others.

Any apparent short-term success puts at risk more libraries, as volunteer libraries spread like a cancer across the library network. More library managers and librarians will lose their jobs.

Eventually we'll have a library network that is a complete postcode lottery of provision, some failing, a small number managing to stay open, some libraries losing their neutrality and being taken over by groups with agendas to promote.

In the middle you will likely have an old central library desperately in need of refurbishment or replacement, or a central PFI library the council can barely afford the monthly payments on.

I wish it wasn't so. I'm not attacking those blackmailed into saving their library by feckless councils' short-sighted cuts. Given the option of volunteering or my local library closing, I'm sure I would probably do the same thing.

I hate the position they've been put in, and I wish them luck. But it's not my responsibility. We all know who is responsible. It's the councils, Vaizey and the politicians and officers (and some in the profession) promoting this agenda.

My biggest concern is that Labour aren't going to be any different in power if they win or form the coalition next year. Despite their warm words in opposition, I suspect they'll not intervene to enforce the 1964 Act or get the councils to work together to save costs rather than cull the library staff.

Most councils out there are Labour. Once they've got power again they'll be no different to the Tories. We'll have co-operatives as the saviour of libraries rather than the Big Society.

Again, my viewpoint isn't attacking volunteers. But I'm dead against volunteer libraries. And I will use my time to fight that failed idea rather than support it.

# Good news? We'll Sieghart...

The Sieghart inquiry on public libraries is due to report soon. Like everyone else, TLC is holding its breath...

The report should – at last – acknowledge that there's a crisis. And that it matters. Even this is progress, compared to the government's cynical see-no-evil stance.

Sieghart is aiming to produce ideas for action, with funding sources, rather than yet another debate on the issues. Good!

When the report comes out, TLC will make sure it's promoted, debated and (if it delivers the goods) acted on – before the situation deteriorates even further.

Meanwhile, while we cover the bad news, this issue spotlights some of the good news.

A hopeful court ruling. New promotional materials – badly needed, as you told us at last year's Speak Up For Libraries conference.

Examples of the specialist help that professional services can give to the many people who need extra support. A writer's affirmation of the value of libraries as a public service.

Let's hope we won't soon be calling this the nostalgia issue. That's up to us campaigners.



## The damage

The latest count on [www.publiclibrariesnews.com](http://www.publiclibrariesnews.com):

Just since 1 April 2014: 158 static libraries and 7 mobile libraries now under threat of closure/passing to volunteers. 10 libraries (2 static and 8 mobile) libraries already closed. 9 libraries already passed to volunteers.

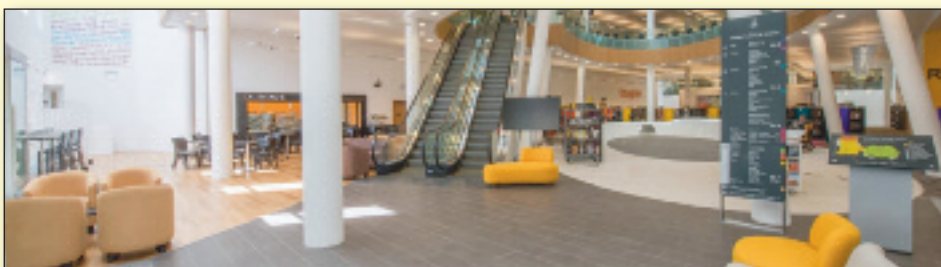
In 2013–14: 491 libraries reported as under threat of closure or passing to volunteer groups.

Total: since 1 April 2013, 675 libraries (static or mobile) closed, passed to volunteers or threatened with the same (out a UK total of c.4,265).

This count is likely to be out of date by the time this magazine reaches you. New plans for really shocking cuts are announced almost daily, almost always with an offer to local people to 'save' their libraries by taking on full responsibility themselves. Many of these libraries are in deprived areas. Among the worst examples are:

- Kirklees – one option is to close 24 libraries, leaving just two.
- Liverpool – 11 out of 18 libraries to close.
- Islington – possible closure of 5 out of 10 libraries.
- Devon – 28 out of 50 libraries offered to volunteers.
- Staffordshire – 24 out of 43 libraries offered to volunteers.

Not to mention numerous proposed cuts in opening hours, stock, professional staff etc etc etc...



■ Liverpool – multi-million Central Library, but... Photo by Mark McNulty

## Lincs united



We take off our hat to Save Lincolnshire Libraries. Faced with an insane plan to close 29 of the county's 44 libraries (and, predictably, hand them over to volunteers) they co-ordinated a massive campaign that is an example of ideal practice for anyone faced with the same problem. Check out their website.

Although SLL demonstrated 100% opposition to its plan, Lincs County Council would not reconsider. Undeterred, SLL organised a judicial review at the High Court.

This is an immense and potentially expensive undertaking (TLC gave £1,000 to help). And previous judicial reviews on library issues have yielded few positive results.

But SLL went ahead – and won on two counts! The judge remarked that he had never before come across a consultation where every single response had been negative.

Of course, his findings were strictly according to the law. Briefly, the consultation was flawed. And Lincs CC was wrong to refuse even to consider an alternative plan (submitted by GLL) that would save all the libraries, and all the librarians' jobs.

The practical implications are complex. We will publish a full legal analysis in the next issue. But there's no doubt that this victory will do a lot to make councils all over the country think again.

Meanwhile, Lincs CC is now obliged by law to look at alternatives. Incredibly, it still insists that the mass closures are its 'preferred option'.

The councillor responsible even says he is 'impressed by the willingness of communities and volunteers to work with us to develop a network of community hubs'.

What he should have said was 'the desperation of local people to save their libraries at all costs, because they know how valuable they are even if we don't'.

SLL's brilliant website has collected furious comments from 'volunteers', making it quite clear that they don't want to run libraries at all. They are offering to do so only because Lincs CC seems determined to destroy their libraries completely unless they take them on.

<http://savelincslibraries.org.uk/2014/02/10/community-groups-give-real-reason-for-saving-libraries>

# Tools for campaigners

Until recently, there was a dire shortage of up-to-date, easy-to-read material to promote public libraries. Now, suddenly, there's quite a choice. All free to download and print. And urgently needed ...



**PLENTY MORE...** The Library Campaign has a longish list of other resources you can link to direct.



**FIND THEM AT:** [www.librarycampaign.com/resources](http://www.librarycampaign.com/resources)

## TOOL FOR DEBATE

This new 'topic guide' aims to encourage schools to debate the topic 'There is no longer a need for public libraries'.

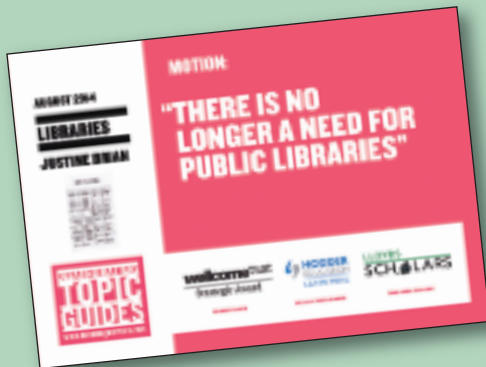
It's a handy tool for general use, too. It sets out the arguments for and against libraries. Good to be prepared for any opposition.

The 'con' section is rather heavy on our old friend 'Everything's online now'; but rather light on its equally dumb co-argument 'Everyone can afford all the books they need - and every book in print is available in the nearest charity shop.'

We can think of other arguments that are too lightly sketched in as well.

But it is a valuable - and mercifully brief - starter, with links to further reading.

It comes from the Institute of Ideas, which runs a national 'Debating Matters' contest for sixth-formers. Sponsors include the Medical Research Council, the Wellcome Trust and assorted universities.



**DOWNLOAD THE TOPIC GUIDE AT:**

[www.debatingmatters.com/documents/DM\\_TopicGuidesLibraries20141.pdf](http://www.debatingmatters.com/documents/DM_TopicGuidesLibraries20141.pdf)



## CLASSIC POSTERS

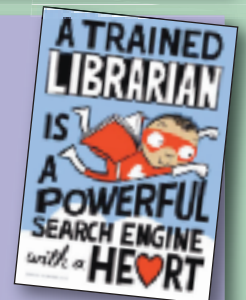
Phil Bradley's wide range of witty campaign posters are adapted from wartime classics (and copyright-free).

**DOWNLOAD FREE AT:**

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/philbradley/sets/72157625923493122>

## SUPPORT LIBRARIANS!

Artist Sarah McIntyre designed this clever poster to help make the case for proper professional staff.



**DOWNLOAD FREE AT:**

<http://jabberworks.livejournal.com/525413.html>

## SUMMER READING CHALLENGE

This Reading Agency annual project is one of the best-ever arguments for public libraries. Almost every library service offers it.

Depending how well they use the resources (costing just £1 per child), the results can be spectacular.

Numbers for this year aren't in yet, but last year it kept a record 810,000 kids enjoying books through the summer holiday.

In many cases, SRC kindles an enthusiasm for reading that just hadn't existed before. It also prevents the dip in reading skills that often happens during the summer break.

One parent perceptively described it as 'reading for pleasure, not because the school said so'. And that's the real key to literacy.

This summer's Mythical Maze website will stay up, with artwork, games and goodies that keep children finding and reading new books.

Also worth using is the 2009 report by the UK Literacy Association, outlining the reading gains made by SRC participants compared with those who did not take part.



**USE THE WEBSITE:** <http://summerreadingchallenge.org.uk>

**USE THE RESEARCH:** [http://readingagency.org.uk/children/Final\\_SRC\\_Impact\\_research\\_report\\_Dec\\_09%20v2.pdf](http://readingagency.org.uk/children/Final_SRC_Impact_research_report_Dec_09%20v2.pdf)

# 4 LIBRARY OFFERS

The Society of Chief Librarians is working hard on the four Universal Offers it launched last year with The Reading Agency. The blue poster sets it all out.

It explains how vital public libraries are in four areas – reading, health, information and digital. It lists exactly what they can offer right now (and serves as a checklist to make sure they are doing it!)

Most library authorities have signed up. Has yours?

Now, just out, is 'Inspiring People, Connecting Communities', a colourful new booklet spelling out the offers with background information and pictures. Aimed at the general public – and local decision makers...

**DOWNLOAD THE POSTER AND BOOKLET AT:**  
[www.goscl.com](http://www.goscl.com)

The four Universal Offers cover the four key areas of service which our customers and our stakeholders see as being integral to a 21st century library service.

**SCL** Leading & Managing Public Libraries

**Health offer**  
New research shows increasing public library care, public health and wellbeing of local communities.

- Books on Prescription
- Provide a network of local health services, including community spaces
- Community health training and advice
- Support staff with local knowledge
- Assisted access
- Public health promotion activity

**Digital offer**  
Recognise that the development of digital services, available across a range of devices, is a 21st century library service – and it supports and enables the delivery of all the Universal Offers.

- Free access to the Internet for every customer
- 24/7 internet access
- Clear and accessible online information about library services
- Staff trained to help customers access digital information
- Ability for customers to join online
- Ability to be contacted online for answers to customer enquiries
- 24/7 internet services through a virtual library presence
- Ability to remove & remove items remotely

**Reading offer**  
This is a digital learning resource which is used in a variety of ways and provides reading services within a local community.

- Builds on public demand for a help and engaging reading offer with reading groups, challenges, drop-ins, etc. to build a vibrant, inclusive and enjoyable reading environment
- Offers help, advice, and support to those who struggle to read
- Offers free computer and internet access
- Provides supported online access
- Provides services for targeted audiences

**Information offer**  
The focus of the offer is on helping people to access information and services within their local community. This includes the provision of a range of information and services.

- Supports people to access information and services online in 100% of cases
- Helps people to access information and services online in 100% of cases
- Helps people to access information and services online in 100% of cases
- Helps people to access information and services online in 100% of cases



**The Universal Health Offer**

Public libraries are essential to the health and wellbeing of our communities. They provide a range of services that support the health and wellbeing of our communities.

Public libraries are essential to the health and wellbeing of our communities. They provide a range of services that support the health and wellbeing of our communities.

**The Universal Digital Offer**

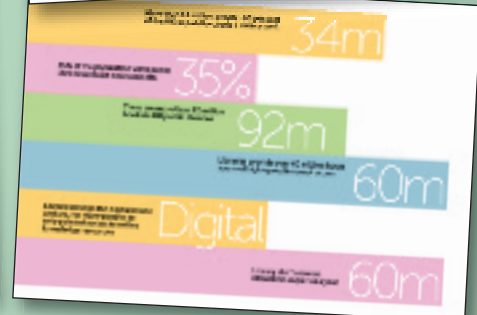
Public libraries are essential to the digital wellbeing of our communities. They provide a range of services that support the digital wellbeing of our communities.

Public libraries are essential to the digital wellbeing of our communities. They provide a range of services that support the digital wellbeing of our communities.

**The Universal Reading Offer**

Public libraries are essential to the reading wellbeing of our communities. They provide a range of services that support the reading wellbeing of our communities.

Public libraries are essential to the reading wellbeing of our communities. They provide a range of services that support the reading wellbeing of our communities.



**The Universal Information Offer**

Public libraries are essential to the information wellbeing of our communities. They provide a range of services that support the information wellbeing of our communities.

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## THE BENEFITS OF LIBRARIES

From the Carnegie Trust UK, a different take – a wider view of the way libraries contribute to society. Not to mention local councils' priorities. Minimal wording, maximum impact to show how libraries work as social hubs, cultural centres, learning hubs and economic enablers. Titled 'Speaking Volumes: The Impact of Public Libraries on

Wellbeing', it's a leaflet that folds out to become a poster. What's more, there is an online database of examples and evidence that back up the claims made, for each of the four areas. This makes for a brilliant promotional tool – starting with a really simple at-a-glance explanation, then backing it up with a formidable list of research findings (and links to the full reports) that should convince even the most sceptical.



# THE LIBRARY A-Z

Here's an example of collective working, just to remind us of the kind of values that underpin public libraries. All done by non-official bodies and individuals, working together.

An idea was suggested by Gary Green (Voices for the Library) at Library Camp, the regular librarians' informal 'unconference'. The idea: a bright, colourful A-Z expressing all the things libraries can do (not just books). People liked it.

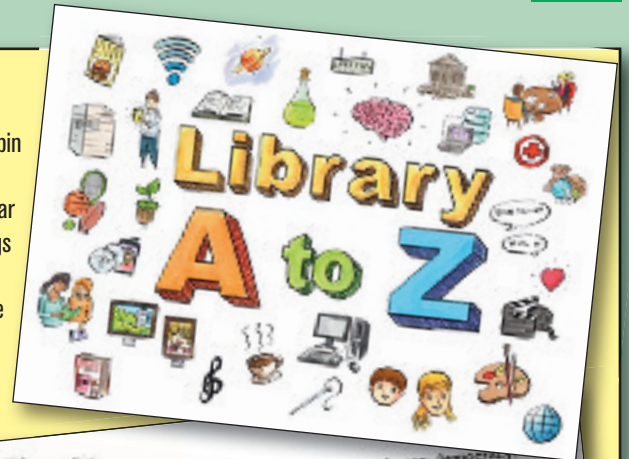
Andrew Walsh at Huddersfield University took on the project. The idea was floated on the crowdfunding website Kickstarter. Donations started coming in from all kinds of people (155 in total!). And many people chipped in with ideas for the wording.

The Library Campaign stepped in as the major sponsor with £1,500. That meant the project was secure, and could get moving. Result: a booklet, posters and post-cards available for anyone to download and use locally, in any way they can.

A big campaign is on the way to get copies to politicians and the press, with plenty of social media activity to spread the news. Everyone can play a part. It's all yours. That's what it's all about!



DOWNLOAD THE A-Z AT: <http://libraryatoz.org>



D is for choice: choice; database; database; Dewey; digital literacy; discovery; diversity; download (things that the library buys); dry; dual; Dyslexia / disability support.

I should ensure that everyone can gain access to information and that people's ability to do this is not a barrier. The role of a library is, therefore, absolutely central to a democracy. Without this, our communities can become fragmented by the actions of their representatives, and we are consequently unable to provide the democratic process. This is particularly a concern for the general public who cannot afford to be left alone to form opinions. Whilst the different are engaged with the democratic process, the poor are left isolated and disempowered.

DOWNLOAD THE LEAFLET/POSTER AND THE 4 DATABASES AT:  
[www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/changing-minds/knowledge---culture/the-future-of-libraries/speaking-volumes](http://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/changing-minds/knowledge---culture/the-future-of-libraries/speaking-volumes)  
 YOU CAN ALSO ORDER HARD COPIES BY EMAILING: [info@carnegieuk.org](mailto:info@carnegieuk.org)



# Libraries for everyone

The London Borough of Lambeth isn't closing any libraries. Instead, it has co-operated with a local resident to develop in one of its branches a pioneering set of low-cost aids that make reading instantly easy for people with serious sight problems, dyslexia, or just the normal problems of old age – with no special training.

Now the equipment has been thoroughly user-tested, it will be rolled out to all Lambeth's branches. And, it's hoped, to many more public libraries...

**Christina Burnett** explains.

'There's nothing much for me in a library,' a partially sighted young woman told me.

'I HATE libraries,' said an elderly man, blind from birth.

'Even when I was at college I didn't really spend any time in the library,' remarked a visually-impaired young professional. 'What you have done here is amazing.'

What we have done is create **LIBRARIES FOR EVERYONE** – a new accessible-by-default model for public libraries which has been piloted at Tate South Lambeth Library in Vauxhall and is being rolled out to all Lambeth's libraries.

With this new model, all of us – blind and sighted, young and old, speed readers and dyslexics – can make full use of the fantastic public resources that libraries provide.

**LIBRARIES FOR EVERYONE** is attracting national interest. In the last few months we have had meetings with Libraries Minister Ed Vaizey, Minister for Disabled People Mike Penning and the Government Digital Service in the Cabinet Office. We were also invited to

give evidence to the panel of the Independent Review on Libraries headed by William Sieghart.

For too long, our libraries have been operating a silent policy of exclusion. No-one intended this.

Lack of knowledge, training and money mean that very few public libraries have up-to-date, functioning equipment and programmes which enable access to print and computer/internet resources for citizens who can't see or read in the conventional way.

That's millions of excluded people who can now be welcomed back with open arms.

The new model deploys Advanced Reading Technology to overturn the old-fashioned 'disabled computer' approach.

It opens up to sight and print-impaired citizens the access that most people take for granted.

Millions of us – if we are lucky enough to live a long time – will need these resources, because 60% of the population has an eye complaint by the age of 75. Most of us already need reading glasses in our 50s.

In Lambeth alone, over 1,000 people are registered blind/visually impaired. Many thousands more are

living with sight loss which is below the registration threshold, so they are not entitled to any support.

Most sight-loss is age-related, so the need is increasing fast as the population ages. Yet local authority support for visual impairment has been cut by 43% since 2005 (RNIB).

Estimates suggest that 10% of the population has dyslexia. Schools offer some help, but there is no statutory support for adults with dyslexia – so having access to this technology in the library offers a lifeline.

Less than 10% of print material is available in any alternative format (large print, Braille, audio etc).

If you can't read, for whatever reason, you lose access to 90% of print-based information, without which it is extremely difficult to study, work, or manage your life.

If you have difficulty reading you probably also have difficulty writing, so your communication channels will be severely restricted.

When you come to Tate South Lambeth Library, you can now 'read' any book or journal on the shelves, even if you have no useable sight. If dyslexia makes reading difficult, you can still access all of our printed material.

## Very easy to use

Advanced Reading Technology is the name we have given to a range of sophisticated but very easy to use stand-alone digital equipment which is not connected to a computer and requires no computer skills or training.

Some of these machines provide large scale magnification. Others will read aloud within seconds any printed document or book.

You can bring your own letters into the library and have the machine read them to you, instead of having to ask someone else for help.

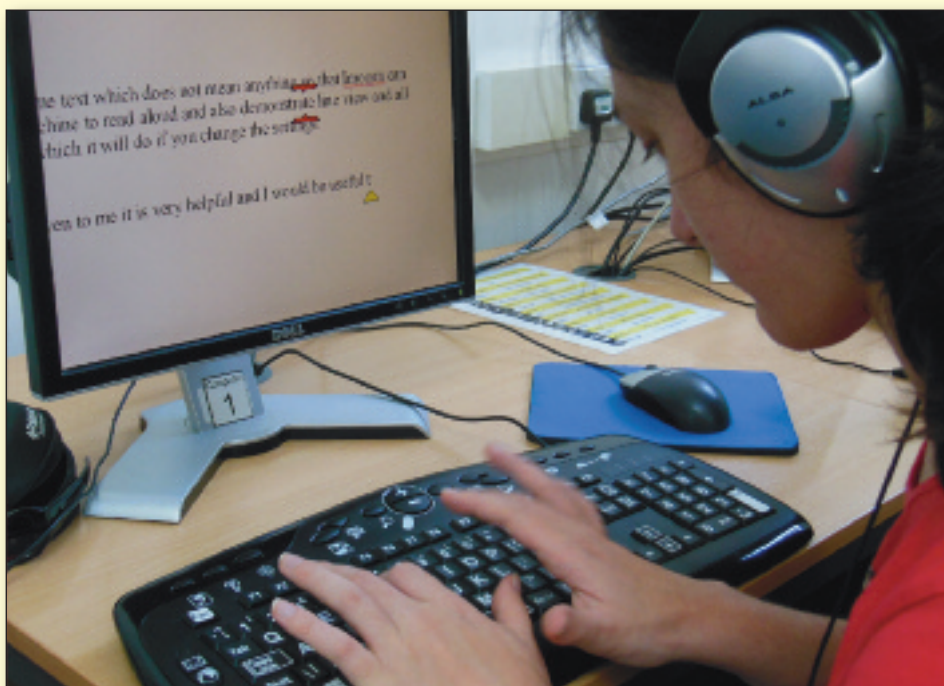
Alongside the Advanced Reading Technology, we have streamlined library access to computer-based screen-reading and magnification software.

We have reversed the traditional model where 'normal' computer equipment is installed and then extra bits are purchased and put on a single 'disabled computer' in order to tick equalities boxes.

This model does not work for library users. Many feel humiliated by having to ask for the disabled computer and are frustrated by long waits for staff to help them with inaccessible equipment.

If – as is often the case – a library has just one accessible computer, the user has no alternative options even when other computers are not being used. So people often give up and never come back.

At Tate South Lambeth EVERY computer has a large-print keyboard (large PRINT, not large KEY, keyboards, which do cause problems for many).





■ The sound reader works for any kind of printed material.

The keyboards also give one-touch access to the internet, and to speech and magnification. This means that all the computers are accessible, to everyone, at all times.

But how does this affect 'ordinary' library users?

We installed the accessible keyboards at Tate South Lambeth in January 2014 and invited evaluation from all our library users. 93% of respondents loved the keyboards and told us they should be in all Lambeth's libraries.

**Lambeth Libraries & Archives took immediate action. Now Lambeth is the first library authority in the country to have fully accessible keyboards on all library computers.**

The average cost of this was just £350 per library (yes, that's per WHOLE LIBRARY, not per keyboard).

Why are the keyboards so important? Because large print enables many more people to see the keys.

This means that, with no other help or training, you can revolutionise access for everyone in your community at negligible cost.

In addition, if your library authority runs commercial screenreader/magnifier software like Dolphin SuperNova or ZoomText, those who cannot use a mouse and screen can easily access the internet via these programmes.

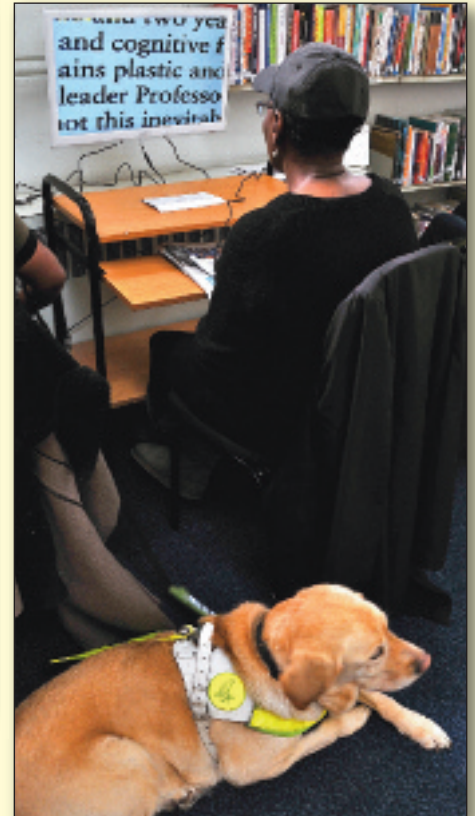
They just use the keyboard's one-touch access, instead of having to spend many weeks mastering special keystrokes.

If you don't have this commercial software, you can install free screen-reading programmes (like NVDA, Thunder or WebBLE).

We also use a cheap and easy to use magnification system, the Cobolt TV mouse magnifier (£50). This works with any normal TV. It magnifies on to the screen whatever text or image you roll the mouse across.

This also requires no training or help from library staff and gives access to print for people who just need magnification, not speech.

For those who do need speech, we believe that the best and easiest to use reading machine (OCR text to



■ Mouse magnifier – just £50 plus a TV.

speech scanner) is the Eye Pal Solo (list price around £1,500, but much cheaper in bulk).

This machine can read a book aloud to you within 15 seconds. You turn the pages of the book in the usual way, but you need no sight or reading ability because the machine scans the text and reads it back to you.

Of course it can also read letters, documents, newspapers etc (although newspapers can be a bit tricky because of photos and columns).

Lambeth aims to roll out this equipment to all its 10 libraries as soon as possible. At present only Streatham Tate and Tate South Lambeth have the full complement.

The equipment is on permanent display for public use in both these libraries. Do come and see us if you would like to know more.

In August we started running special training on the equipment and programmes for Lambeth library staff, because of course there are complexities and background knowledge which staff need to understand.

We hope soon to be able to offer support to other library authorities, so that all public libraries in England can truly be for everyone.

**Christina Burnett is a director of Vauxhall CIC, a small not-for-profit company which creates innovative digital and community events. Vauxhall CIC delivers Digital Tuesdays, a scheme which creates vibrant digital communities around public libraries. For more information see [www.digitaltuesdays.co.uk](http://www.digitaltuesdays.co.uk)**



■ Large print on normal-size keys. One click access to internet, sound and magnification.

# Dyslexia-friendly libraries

A whole 10% of the population struggles with dyslexia. Katrina Cochrane at the British Dyslexia Association says: 'We have many members who find public libraries valuable, and need them to support their dyslexia. Many feel the library service is diminishing, and they have less access to books in alternative formats – especially if they are unemployed.'

Kent County Council is an example of what can be done with simple measures, underpinned by proper training for staff. These are some extracts from the BDA's handbook by Liz Taylor, KCC's Service Development Librarian – Diversity and Social Inclusion. Just in time for Dyslexia Awareness Week 2014 – Monday 3 November to Sunday 9 November! See [www.bdadyslexia.org.uk](http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk)

## Working towards dyslexia friendly libraries in Kent

- Tinted paper available for photocopying and printing
- Exempt status – no overdue fines
- Free Spoken Word books
- Reading stands at main town centre libraries
- Overlays and coloured rulers available in each district
- Contacts with West Kent Dyslexia group, South Kent and East Kent groups
- Dyslexia friendly collections in each district
- Homework clubs with special resources including pen holders, electronic dictionaries and overlays



Dyslexia Action publicity

such as dyspraxia or attention deficit disorder, resulting in variation in the degree and nature of individuals' strengths and weaknesses.

### What is dyslexia?

The word comes from the Greek and means 'difficulty with words'. It is likely to be present at birth, and to be life-long in its effects.

It is characterised by difficulties in processing word-sounds, rapid naming, working memory, processing speed, and the automatic development of skills that may not match up to an individual's other cognitive abilities.

It tends to be resistant to conventional teaching methods, but its effects can be mitigated by, for instance, information technology and supportive counselling.

### Some facts

- Dyslexia tends to run in families. There are several genes that contribute to a genetic risk of dyslexia.
- Brain scanning studies suggest that, in dyslexic people, the connections between different language areas of the brain do not work as efficiently as they should.
- Differences are not linked to intelligence.
- Many dyslexic people have strengths and abilities in creative and visually-based thinking.
- Dyslexia varies in severity. It often occurs alongside other specific learning difficulties,

### Possible difficulties:

- Reading hesitantly
- Misreading, making understanding difficult
- Difficulty with sequences, e.g. getting dates in order
- Poor organisation or time management
- Difficulty organising thoughts clearly
- Erratic spelling

### Possible strengths:

- Innovative thinkers
- Excellent trouble shooters
- Intuitive problem solving
- Creative in many different ways
- Lateral thinkers

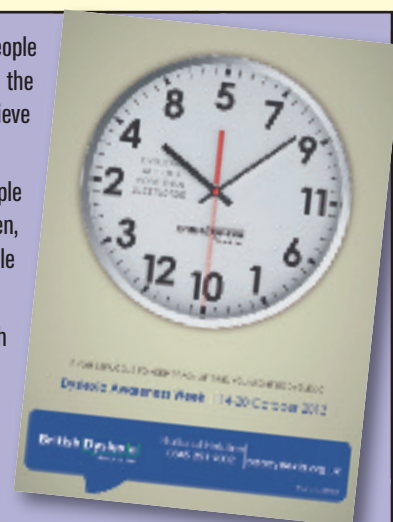
## SUPPORT

**British Dyslexia Association.** Vision is of a dyslexia-friendly society that will enable all dyslexic people to reach their potential. Main aims are to encourage schools to become dyslexia-friendly, to reduce the number of dyslexic young people in the criminal justice system and to enable dyslexic people to achieve their potential in the workplace. [www.bdadyslexia.org.uk](http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk)

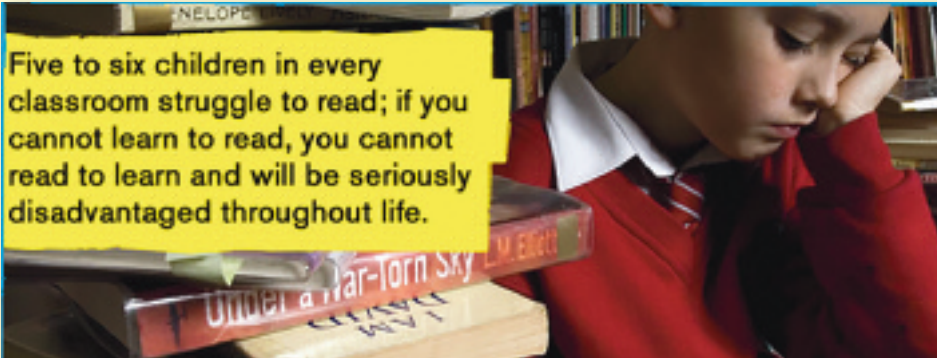
**Dyslexia Action.** A national charity and the UK's leading provider of services and support for people with dyslexia and literacy difficulties. Specialises in assessments and tuition for adults and children, and supplying specialist teacher training courses and workplace consultations. Services are available from 26 centres around the country. [www.dyslexiaaction.org.uk](http://www.dyslexiaaction.org.uk)

**Dyslexia Research Trust.** Covers everything you need to know about dyslexia, including research and dyslexia clinics. [www.dyslexic.org.uk/index.htm](http://www.dyslexic.org.uk/index.htm)

**Being Dyslexic.** Website provides a range of information for anyone who is either dyslexic or interested in dyslexia. All free and available to share. Also hosts one of the largest dyslexia community forums on the internet. [www.beingdyslexic.co.uk](http://www.beingdyslexic.co.uk)



BDA poster



## Choosing books

Dyslexia Action counts books as dyslexia-friendly if they meet most of these criteria:

- Of interest to the reader and relevant to his/her age – reluctant and slow readers need to have their imaginations engaged and their efforts rewarded.
- Well structured and easy to follow. Simplicity of information and syntax make it easier to follow the story.
- Use vocabulary familiar to the reader. Dyslexic readers often have a limited sight vocabulary.
- Have short sentences and paragraphs. These help to maintain interest and encourage a feeling of progress.
- Are well laid out, with wide margins and plenty of white space. These encourage the reader to maintain a good reading flow and pace.
- Have the right margins unjustified (ragged). Justified text may look neat, but with unjustified text it is easier to distinguish between lines read and those not yet read.
- Have headings, bullets and other signposting where appropriate. These help the reader navigate the content more easily.
- Have pictures with captions, callouts and boxed text where relevant – these act as signposts and help to break up the main text into manageable chunks.
- Are printed on tinted paper – this helps reduce the resonance of black text on bright white paper. Avoid light text on a dark background. Matt paper is preferable to glossy paper, as this reduces glare. Ensure the paper is heavy enough to prevent text glaring through from the back.
- Are printed in a clear sans serif font that is kerned so that the letters are easily distinguishable – some fonts are very ornate and some have letters that join together to form another (such as an r and n that join to look like m).
- Have a minimum print size of 11pt – but are not insultingly large for the intended age range.
- Above all they should look like books that anyone would enjoy reading – well written, well designed and interesting.

## Non-fiction – exploring ways of coping with dyslexia

- Condon, Judith – **When It's Hard to Learn**  
 Edwards, Nicola – **My Friend Has Dyslexia**  
 Ryden, Michael – **Dyslexia: How would I cope?**  
 Sanders, Pete – **What Do You Know About Dyslexia and Associated Difficulties**  
 Spillsbury, Louise – **What Does it Mean to Have Dyslexia?**  
 Wiltshire, Paula – **Dyslexia**

## Biographies of famous people with dyslexia

- Alcraft, Rob – **Anita Roddick**  
 Alcraft, Rob – **Richard Branson**  
 Brown, Paul – **Anita Roddick and the Body Shop**  
 Connolly, Sean – **Leonardo da Vinci**  
 Ganeri, Anita – **Thomas Edison**  
 Langley, Andrew – **Hans Christian Anderson**  
 Lynch, Wendy – **Walt Disney**  
 Mason, Antony – **Leonardo da Vinci**  
 Middleton, Haydn – **Thomas Edison: The Wizard Inventor**  
 Reid, Struan – **Albert Einstein**  
 Twist, Clint – **Charles Darwin, On the Trail of Evolution**  
 Wilkins, Verna – **Benjamin Zephaniah: A Profile**

## NATIONAL CONTEXT

Dyslexia is a recognised difficulty under the Equality Act 2010. This means that employers and service providers should ensure that disabled people are not treated unfavourably and are offered reasonable adjustments or support.

## 10 dyslexia-friendly children's books

Selected by Dyslexia Action from WikiREADia – [www.wikireadia.org.uk](http://www.wikireadia.org.uk):

**Framed**, Frank Cottrell Boyce (£5.99, Macmillan)

**Candyfloss**, Jacqueline Wilson (£12.99, Doubleday)

**Alone on a Wide Wide Sea**, Michael Morpurgo (£10.99, HarperCollins)

**The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas**, John Boyne (£10.99, David Fickling)

**Cirque Du Freak**, Darren Shan (£4.99, HarperCollins)

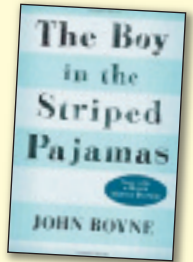
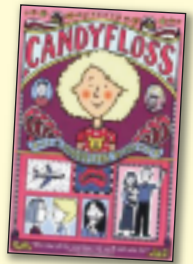
**The Legend of Spud Murphy**, Eoin Colfer (£3.99, Puffin)

**The Twits**, Roald Dahl (£4.99, Puffin)

**The Temple of the Ruby of Fire**, Geronimo Stilton (£3.99, Scholastic)

**Judy Mood**, Megan McDonald (£3.99, Walker)

**The Sheep-Pig**, Dick King-Smith (£4.99, Puffin)



## Dyslexia-friendly books

**Barrington Stoke Books** aimed at children (age 8–13) and young people (13–16) with dyslexia. The books have cream paper, well-spaced text and an easy to read font. The website holds a complete listing which can be checked against the library catalogue for locations. There is a very useful information pack for parents, teachers and librarians. Download at: [www.barringtonstoke.co.uk](http://www.barringtonstoke.co.uk)

**Guide to choosing Dyslexia-Friendly Books for Kids**. Waterstones and Dyslexia Action have produced a leaflet guide which includes ways to support children with their reading, how to choose dyslexia friendly books and a suggested reading list. Download at: [www.waterstones.com/wat/images/special/mag/waterstones\\_dyslexia\\_action\\_guide.pdf](http://www.waterstones.com/wat/images/special/mag/waterstones_dyslexia_action_guide.pdf)

RIF's recommended book list for less confident and less keen readers ages 5–13  
[www.rif.org.uk/projectzone/resourcesBooks.htm](http://www.rif.org.uk/projectzone/resourcesBooks.htm)

**Young Calibre** is a free postal audio books library for anyone under 16 who has a visual impairment, dyslexia or a physical disability which makes it difficult to read ordinary print.  
[www.calibre.org.uk/modResourcesLibrary/HtmlRenderer/aboutyoungcalibre.html](http://www.calibre.org.uk/modResourcesLibrary/HtmlRenderer/aboutyoungcalibre.html)

**Listening Books**, a charity which provides a subscription postal audio book service to anyone who has a disability that makes it difficult to read in the usual way: [www.listening-books.org.uk](http://www.listening-books.org.uk)

# Libraries for me

Author **Toby Litt** gave this talk at a recent meeting of Friends of West Norwood Library, Lambeth, London.

**Stand-up comedians all have the same biography: I overcame bullying by being funny. Writers, too, tend often to say the same thing: I had this fantastic English teacher.**

I expect we could all say similar things, as readers, about libraries and our experiences of them. If one or more libraries weren't – at some stage – very important for you, then you wouldn't be here. I'm preaching to the converted – but sometimes the converted need a little preaching, to restore their faith in the book.

I was recently at the Bailey's Women's Prize for Fiction evening. And Syl Saller, Chief Marketing Officer or Global Innovation Director at Diageo (a large alcoholic beverages company), said pretty much what I'm going to say to you today. She talked about how going to the library, was such a great thing. About how one particular librarian was important to her. About how books got her through her difficult teenage years.

She did say that, at one point, she wanted to be a writer – but that hadn't come off. And that's where

we differ. I did become a writer, as well as Global Innovation Director at Toby Litt Inc, and that's why I'm here. I'd like to tell you, briefly, about four libraries that were important to me.

The first was Amptill Library, in Amptill, Bedfordshire, where I grew up. It was a small library in a former church set up by the Primitive Methodists. It was on Saunders Piece, which was on my route to and from primary school.

One of the librarians there was X, the mother of my best friend, Y. This had its upsides and downsides. X was prepared to ignore overdue books, and let me get out more than I should. She was also, however, there quite often, and she was my best friend's mum.

I remember one time, I must have been eleven or twelve years old, and I had got out a novel called *Switchback* by Molly Parkin. These days it is filed under Women's Erotica.

Back then, I saw it on a spinner, liked the idea of the cover, was curious about sex, so took it out when a librarian I didn't know was on the desk.



■ **Toby Litt.** Photo: Katie Cooke

When I wanted to return it, however, X always seemed to be there. And I couldn't bring myself to hand it over to her – I could see her eyebrows going up (her eyebrows went up quite often). I could imagine her passing on the news to Y (she told him everything).

Trying to return that copy of *Switchback*, without getting caught, made going to the library quite a heart-pounding business. But I found it exciting at

# Libraries for all

Now I'd like to talk about libraries more generally. What I believe about them, and their future.

It is too easy to forget what a genius-level idea libraries are. But if, for a moment, you de-invent and then re-invent them, it's not hard to imagine some slick young thinker getting up on his TED-legs to tell us how great it would be for us to share books, just as we now share cars and clothes. And everyone would retweet the link, and Facebook about it, and call him a visionary.

It is politically advantageous for right-wingers (pro-free market, anti-state) to make voters believe they get very little from the state – that the state is bad at giving them things, that the state is mean, that private companies are better, that private companies are more generous.

Libraries are one of the points where the citizen (tax-payer or not) can increase what they

get from the state. It's possible for the dedicated reader of, say, romance novels or graphic novels, to get through £500 worth of books a year.

The message borrowers receive is that the state isn't all take. Your local council wants to help you develop and entertain yourself.

On Prague's National Theatre there is a slogan: 'To the Nation, From the Nation'. That's what libraries are now, from the nation to the nation. Some of them may have come from Mr Carnegie and Mr Tate in the beginning, but they didn't leave all that much money for maintenance. We've taken them over. They're ours to keep or destroy.

If libraries go, our society will have – without question – become more selfish. Yet another civic space, another common, will have been destroyed.

What should libraries be? Behind me is a little plaque, commemorating the opening of the Old Library Centre. Built 1887.

Re-opened 8th May 2004. And it has a motto: 'A community facility for all'. That's committee-language, inoffensive and voted-through, but it's also accurate and, if you think about it, quite stirring.

I think libraries should 'a community facility for all'. I think libraries should be totally free, open and easy for borrowers to use.

I think librarians should have qualified librarians who are properly trained – not just in the Dewey Decimal system but in dealing with the kinds of people who use libraries, and can help those users find the information they need – to fight their legal battles, to discover their local or personal history. Librarians are a great force for basic social justice. They are the guardians of that kind of portal.

As far as I'm concerned – if it's not staffed by librarians, it's not a library, it's just a building with some books in it.

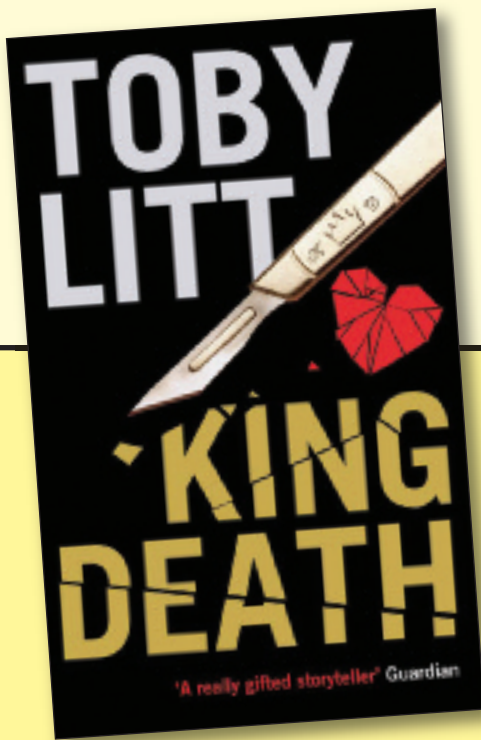
other times – because there were books I could choose and choose to read. Not ones given out at school. Set texts.

There's recently been a literary ding-dong about Michael Gove supposedly banning *To Kill a Mockingbird* from the National Curriculum GCSE for English. And also the works of John Steinbeck.

I'm not with Gove on many things, but about the works of John Steinbeck not being forced on children who might one day enjoy reading books, I am with him 100%. I was given *The Pearl* and *Of Mice and Men* as set texts, and I hated them.

The library was the place where I could go to get the books I wanted – by Arthur C. Clarke, Isaac Asimov, Michael Moorcock... The library gave me cultural independence. There, I could get away from characters dressed in dungarees.

Amphill Library was a portal into bits of the world I wanted to get to. I'm fairly certain that if, at that stage, I hadn't had that link – that thing that kept me going back to books – I wouldn't have become a writer.



There are other buildings with some books in, and most of them charge you money to take the books away, and don't ever want the books back.

Libraries rather than filling potholes – better a slightly bumpy ride to the library than no library at all.

Libraries rather than colourful brochures through the door every month, telling me how wonderful my local council is.

I've said libraries have, for me, been like portals – the portals into society. Let's be honest about who comes through that portal.

The second library I'd like to mention is Bedford Central Library. This was larger, had a better stock of books – but also stocked music on LP and later on CD. It also had a cafe that served Rombouts filter coffee – you know, with the plastic spaceship full of boiling water that lands on the coffee cup of doom, and passes its contents through the duvet of caffeine. Those were very sophisticated, in Bedford, in 1984.

And also sophisticated were the selections I was able to take out, and covertly tape, from the Record Library. It was somewhere I discovered that I liked more than I heard on the radio or saw on *Top of the Pops*.

It was also somewhere to go on a Saturday, when it was raining, and sit and read books taken off the shelf. It was a place to try out being grown-up in my own particular way. It was a portal into a different stage of life, or kind of life.

The third library wasn't in England. It was the English Section of the *Narodni Knihovna* in Prague. I went to live in what was then still Czechoslovakia in 1990.

I had, in between, become obsessed with books – particularly poetry – and done an English degree at Oxford. I was in Prague to teach English, as a completely unqualified TEFL tutor. The library I'm talking about – up some stairs, hidden away as all good things in Prague were – was very little used, because (at one stage) to go there would have attracted attention from the secret police.

I became friendly with the librarian there, and one day she said she had something to show me. I went

Libraries are often, you might almost say predominantly, used by the disenfranchised. Like buses, parks, hospitals, they are civic spaces used by the lonely, the angry, the mentally ill, the politically estranged, the very young, the very old. This isn't incidental – it's what these places are now for.

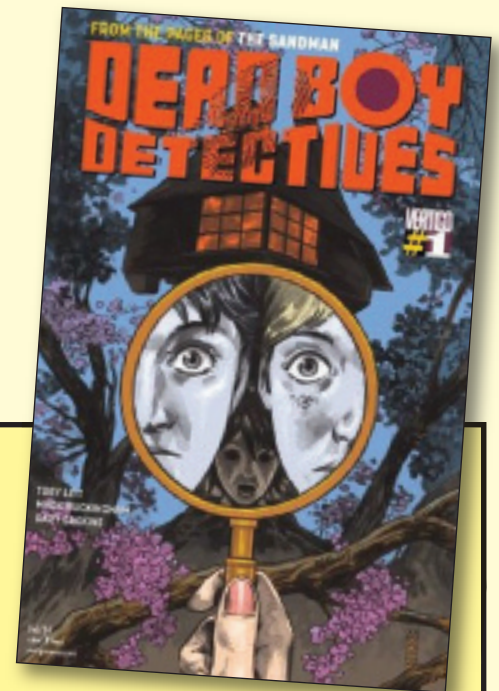
You're not going to catch that many investment brokers or politicians in libraries. The 1% (call them that for swiftness) don't want other people to have touched the books they read. The 1% are too busy to access the kind of slow knowledge libraries provide. They don't visit places just for the sake of visiting them. They need value added in every moment. They're already through their own portals.

I believe libraries, as portals to many things, are extremely important. Just because someone has difficulty with society, it doesn't mean society should make things difficult for them. The opposite – they need to be granted peripheral spaces, easy access, where they can maintain their intellectual dignity and independence.

behind the counter, through a door, into a dusty room twice the size of the library proper. Here were the banned books, but the books they still held. I remember a long line of Arthur Koestler's books, covered in dust. *The Yogi and the Commisar*. *Darkness at Noon*.

This was the library as an unknown place – or a place that you think you know, but really don't. It was a portal into secret stuff, stuff that is part of the knowledge end of Knowledge is Power.

The fourth and final library was West Norwood Library, just across the road. Here was where I took my sons, to storytelling on a Tuesday morning – and here the *Bobbin* was repeatedly Wound Up and the *Wheels on the Bus* went round and round and round... But here was also where I brought them in the hope that, one day, libraries would be as important to them as they have been to me. I was giving them a glimpse of the portal, in hopes they'd choose to go through.



Libraries are the home of autodidacts – the self-educators who have issues with the power-structures of classroom and lecture hall. I don't believe all forms of knowledge should be conventional or institutional. I think it is a weakness of philosophy, science in general, that it is by and large only open to those with academic qualifications.

A library card, and a good local library within a borough holding a decent stock of books – this is the greatest empowerment we can give some people.

Libraries are our portals. They get us out of ourselves. They take us away from the centre.

A society should not be all centre – especially when that centre is a shopping centre.

