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The National Year of Reading: a case study of librarians as key partners in empowering communities and building a nation of readers.

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108 — Libraries for literacy: linking generations, empowering communities — Literacy and Reading

Abstract:

The UK National Year of Reading (NYR) campaign in 2008 was about celebrating and encouraging reading in all its forms. The aim was to promote reading in the family and beyond and help to build a nation of readers. This meant encouraging reading both for pleasure and as a means of improving learning, achievement and individual prospects. The government sponsored campaign focused on ways of attracting people to start reading or develop existing skills. A national headline target driven media campaign promoted the year based on a number of key messages:

- *Everything begins with reading*
- *Join your library – everything you could wish to read, for free*
- *Reading anything, anytime anywhere is good*

Public libraries were identified as essential partners in the NYR campaign strategy and provided an opportunity for public libraries to be in the political limelight. The inclusion of public libraries acknowledged they can make a measurable and substantial contribution to local economies, and help to bridge social divides. This case study examines the social impact and legacy of The National Year of Reading (NYR) 2008 and the innovative ways in which UK public librarians used the NYR to work in collaboration with a range of partner organisations to reach multi-cultural target groups in their local communities. The paper will discuss the positive interventions by librarians in facilitating and leading change during the NYR campaign and beyond. The reading provision targeted all generations - adults, young people and children; diverse ethnic communities; migrant workers; specific workforce groups; hard to reach groups such as the homeless and those with mental health

needs. The paper advocates using the Generic Social Outcomes framework to help evidence how public libraries contribute to diverse agendas and demonstrate their value to the community.

Introduction

In the UK the National Year of Reading (NYR) campaign in 2008 was about celebrating and encouraging reading in all its forms. The aim was to promote reading in the family and beyond and help to build a nation of readers. This meant encouraging reading both for pleasure and as a means of improving learning, achievement and individual prospects; the campaign focused on ways of attracting people to start reading or develop existing skills. The NYR was designed as a social marketing campaign and the first part of this case study will provide a description of the planning, promotion and delivery of the NYR and will focus on the role of public libraries as key partners in delivering the campaign.

The second part of the case study will focus on findings from a case study in Yorkshire which used the generic social outcomes framework to look at the impact of NYR in two public library authorities. Views and observations from interviews with the library staff involved in the NYR in the Yorkshire case study authorities are used to highlight the challenges and successes involved in the 2008 campaign (Rankin, 2012; Rankin, 2011; Rankin et al, 2009). It is important to hear the voice of the practitioner as this reflects the librarians' view of their experience in planning and delivering the NYR as part of outreach work with the local communities.

Part 1: NYR 2008 – celebrating and encouraging reading

The government sponsored NYR campaign was about celebrating and encouraging reading in all its forms, aiming to promote reading in the family and to help to build a nation of readers (Thomson, 2009). Plans for the NYR were announced in February 2007. The Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) commissioned the National Literacy Trust (NLT), with lead partner The Reading Agency, to run the NYR campaign supported by a consortium of organisations committed to promoting reading. The consortium included Arts Council England, Booktrust, Campaign for Learning, Centre for Literacy in Primary Education, ContinYou, Museums Libraries and Archives Council, The National Youth Agency, NIACE and Volunteer Reading Help. The planning phase ran from January to March 2008 with organisations and local authorities asked to pledge and plan their support. The NYR campaign was launched on 25th April with two high profile media launches in Liverpool and Chelmsford, Essex.

NYR as a social marketing campaign - the media campaign

To create a national public relations campaign and provide advocacy the NLT recruited a central NYR Team who also represented the NYR at national level to stakeholders and government. The central team provided support for the local NYR Coordinators who were nominated in upper-tier local authorities in England – they were seen as local champions of the NYR. The NYR Coordinator role purpose was:

- To champion the NYR within the local authority, advocating both the year itself and the strategic importance of literacy across all service areas.
- To build sustainable partnerships with internal and external partners
- To engage the Chief Executive, elected members, service heads and senior managers in both the campaign year and the long-term legacy of the year.

Honor Wilson-Fletcher the Director of the National Year of Reading flagged up the key message about getting involved:

'So, the National year of Reading needs to reach hesitant readers, reluctant readers, those who do not consider themselves readers (but who are!), and those who are in a position to influence someone's future reading potential' (Wilson-Fletcher, 2008, 3).

The 2008 NYR campaign involved many partners and it gave libraries a bigger stage on which to perform (Dolan and Khan, 2011, 85). The NYR campaign aimed to engage all schools, libraries, community and voluntary organisations as well as the business sector in reading activities and celebrations. These activities started in April 2008 to support ongoing work to achieve national literacy targets, engage parents and families in reading with their children, and develop adult literacy. The NYR was promoted as a social marketing campaign. Social marketing is one of many marketing activities undertaken by the non profit sector, aiming to influence social behaviours not to benefit the marketer, but to benefit the target audience and society in general. The NYR campaign focussed on 'community mobilisation related' behaviour associated with literacy. The key values identified for the year-long social marketing campaign were:

- Impact - both personal and social
- Celebration - positive, enjoyable experiences
- Diversity - of reading experiences and communities
- Participation - co-production of the year with communities and partners
- Creativity - in development and delivery
- Legacy - to create a lasting change in lives and systems

The NYR campaign strategy was to create a network of partnerships to provide engagement and stimulate community-based reading activities. There was a desire to encourage reading for pleasure but also as a means of learning, achievement and individual prospects. Low literacy levels are seen as a barrier to social justice, producing social, economic and cultural exclusion that can scar communities and undermine social cohesion (Dugdale and Clark, 2008). Competence in literacy is essential for life in contemporary society as it dramatically contributes to people's emotional wellbeing, mental health, and economic success. The NYR campaign addressed specific audiences who had low levels of literacy where there was evidence that these were associated with low perceptions of the value of literacy. Whilst the NYR included a universal offer, a number of priority underachieving audiences were also identified:

- Early years
- National Curriculum Key Stage 3 (ages 11-14), especially boys
- White working class boys on free school meals
- Blind and partially sighted children

- Children with dyslexia
- Looked after children (the term generally used to mean those looked after by the state)
- Bangladeshi and Pakistani children
- Eastern European children
- Skills for Life adults (a Government strategy to improve the basic skills of adult literacy, numeracy and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL))

A number of secondary target audiences were also identified including the extended family, the childcare workforce, adult learners, the primary and secondary school workforce and the children's workforce.

Reading and the self perception of readers

The campaign planners acknowledged that for some target groups, reading has an image problem. This challenge was confirmed by research undertaken by the National Literacy Trust into young people's self-perception as readers (Clark et al. 2008). For self-professed 'non-readers' reading is seen as boring, and they do not see its relevance to their lives outside school. Clarke and Douglas (2011) investigated young people's attitudes to reading and writing and suggest that promotion of reading to children and young people reached a peak in 2008 with the NYR campaign. The focus of much of this activity had been on the "narrowing the gap" target audiences – those pupils who had been identified as being less likely to reach the expected levels in reading and writing. Engaging these complex target audiences is particularly challenging, and one librarian saw the NYR as an opportunity to '*reinvent our core service*'.

The public library contribution to NYR partnerships

The enjoyment and promotion of reading is at the heart of public library provision, and for many decades librarians have been actively promoting reading campaigns targeting children and young people (Freeman, 2009). Public libraries were identified as central to the NYR campaign and there was a 100% sign up from the 149 public library authorities in England (Thomson, 2009). The inclusion of public libraries as key partners built on three themes identified as priorities in the 1998 campaign held a decade earlier. These themes were changing attitudes to reading among different audiences, the role of libraries in developing readers, and working in partnership (National Literacy Trust, 1999; Streatfield, 1999). Guidelines from the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professions (CILIP) state that a good library service should provide a positive experience for local people. Libraries meet key policy objectives by providing a positive future for children and young people; strong safe and sustainable communities; equality, community cohesion and social justice; health improvements, and well-being (CILIP, 2010). The research evidence shows important links between reading, educational attainment and family engagement:

'Public library use is strongly correlated with positive outcomes for reading attitudes, motivation, behaviour and school attainment. Family engagement is well understood as a key element in supporting educational achievement, and it seems that the public library use, as well as being associated with similar

positive child outcomes to school library use, has in addition a particularly specialised correlation with family support for reading... 'For those children and young people who do not use their public libraries, the majority, 52%, cited that this was because their family did not go'.... (Clark and Hawkins, 2010, 17).

The Reading Agency, a lead partner in delivering the campaign, was identified as an effective champion for the role of public libraries as key players in the successful delivery of NYR. The Reading Agency offered a portfolio of tried and tested national programmes which facilitated library services' participation in the Year and delivery to key target groups without any significant additional resourcing:

- FTP (Fulfilling their Potential) – a national change programme for working with 11-19 year olds
- Vital Link – bringing libraries and adult literacy together through reading for pleasure
- Summer Reading Challenge – inspiring 4-11 year olds to read more over the summer holidays
- Chatterbooks – creative reading groups for 4-12 year olds
- Big Book Share – parents in prison supporting their children's reading
- National Reading group Development programmes – giving everyone an equal chance to join a library reading group
- TRF – practical resources to support all staff who work with children, young people and families

The NYR co-ordinators role was to bring together representatives from key areas of the authority to share existing and planned work on literacy and reader development. Emily Thorne, the local government manager for the NYR, made the strong case –

'Focussing on the literacy of all, both young and old, has the potential not only to improve educational attainment and basic skills, but also to increase participation, link libraries and schools, improve economic regeneration and promote inclusion.' (Thorne, 2008, 26).

Librarians were involved in local authority NYR steering groups which brought together many different services and agencies and early on there was a realisation that the NYR provided an opportunity for creative connections. Here is the comment of one librarian in describing his involvement in the local steering group:

'We suddenly got access to everyone else's knowledge and could piggy back on other people's events. The NYR was a way of reaching other staff. People don't always respond to emails – meeting people makes such a difference.'

There was an impetus and a focus for the local steering groups to work together on joint projects as the NYR provided a banner head to help promote outreach work. As one interviewee pointed out:

'When it is NYR, you can say to people, 'come along for NYR and let's plan to do this' but whereas if you say 'come along and talk about literacy in the community', then it is a little bit vague...'

The inclusion of public libraries as key partners acknowledged that public libraries make a measurable and substantial contribution to local economies and help to bridge social divides. This observation from a Yorkshire librarian actively involved in the NYR acknowledges the importance of the library as a place:

'In terms of redevelopment, a place becomes a hub if it becomes a place where the community gets used to expecting exciting and valuable reading events, workshops, festivals on a regular basis. I hope that will emerge from the NYR'.

The NYR media campaign and library membership

The NYR campaign needed to focus on ways of attracting people to start reading or develop their existing skills. A national headline media campaign promoted several targeted key messages:

- Everything begins with reading
- Join your library – everything you could wish to read, for free
- Reading anything, anytime, anywhere is good

The year launched with the library campaign to promote the accessibility of reading to all citizens, beginning with a four-page supplement in The Daily Mirror newspaper on the joys of libraries. This was mailed to one million homes of target families and subsequently circulated to 600,000 via The Sunday People newspaper. A key measure of success was the drive to increase library membership and it is worth recounting this statement by Marylaine Block about the 'library card' -

'What does a library card do for people? It allows unlimited learning for everyone. And learning, as we've often been told, is power'. (Block, 2007, 89)

The initial 'new membership' target agreed with the Society of Chief Librarians to be achieved between April and December 2008 was 300,000. According to the evaluation report published by the NLT, by the end of the year the total was 2.3 million new members, far exceeding expectations! (Thomson, 2009, 55).

The NYR also had exposure on UK television. The 'Consequences' TV filler advertisement featured comedians and other celebrities who created a short filler film promoting the key messages for the year - that we all read in a range of media for a range of purposes. The examples included everything from domestic DIY and cookery to reading for pleasure and entertainment. The filler was made available via YouTube and for partners to broadcast locally. Showing the ad on plasma screens in Council offices and in libraries was suggested as an ideal way of getting the NYR message across. As an example, Manchester Libraries, in partnership with the BBC, negotiated for the NYR ad to be screened on the big screens in the city centre. The advert is available on YouTube - it is worth a watch!

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CuNqgEud7u8>

Monthly themes

The NYR co-ordinators received regular newsletters and to help with planning for the year the NYR central team suggested monthly themes as a focus for promotional activities. Each month had a theme for library staff to work with if they wanted to and most authorities chose some to focus on (Mathieson, 2009). Many libraries used this as a basis for enhancing existing programmes or introducing new ideas:

Month (2008)	Theme
April	Read all about it! Links to newspapers and magazines. The library membership campaign.
May	Mind and Body. Reading and learning at work. The knock-on benefits of reading.
June	Reading escapes. Holiday and summer reads.
July	Rhythm and Rhyme. Poems, poetry and lyrics.
August	Read the Game. The influence of sport and how this can help promote reading.
September	You are what you read. Cultural, personal and local identity.
October	Word of Mouth. Storytelling, reading out loud, reading together, reading aloud, live literature.
November	Screen reads. Exploring the diversity of reading and writing; scripts, TV and films.
December	Write the future. Writing, texting, blogging etc

To help with promotional activities, NYR library resources – posters, bookmarks, national joining form and the library membership welcome packs were made available and could be downloaded from the NYR website.

The Wikireadia good practice guide

Library practitioners were encouraged to share ideas and good practice about reading and literacy events using the newly created Wikireadia. A wiki is an online collaborative space which allows a group of people to pool their knowledge to create the best resource. The Wikireadia developed as part of the NYR was promoted as a searchable and editable encyclopaedia of good practice in reading, writing, listening and speaking. It provides a record of all sorts of library related activities and events that took place during the NYR, and it is still available as a shared resource and reference point. Wikireadia is now hosted by the NLT and is promoted as a good practice guide for teachers, librarians, literacy coordinators, adult literacy tutors, local

authority workers and every professional involved in supporting literacy development.

The evaluation of the NYR campaign

In *Reading: The Future* report Thomson (2009) provides a detailed account of the experience of running a national communications campaign and an evaluation of the NYR. The campaign reached nearly 13 million individuals in target social groups C2DE (the lower income segment of the UK population). The headline results include the following encouraging changes in behaviour:

- There was an increase in library membership nationally with 2.3 million new library members recruited between April and December 2008, far exceeding expectations!
- There was a significant increase from 58% to 70% in library membership among C2DE parents and their children.
- The proportion of C2DE parents reading to their children every day increased from 5% to 20%
- Over a quarter of C2DE fathers who read to their children, said they now read every day - this was an increase compared with 19% at the baseline survey
- There was a significant increase in children saying they read with their mothers every day, 32% up from 17%.
- Children saying they read with their mothers every day increased significantly up to 32% from 17%.

The report commentary includes case study descriptions of many of the organisations involved and the events that took place. Thomson (2009) also provides information on the NYR Work Plan and the messaging activity aimed at different target groups. A review of cross-authority partnership working at local level was undertaken by ERS (2009), to help inform the development of legacy. The ERS report highlights issues raised in consultation with stakeholders across the 35 local authorities, and feedback from 85 NYR Coordinators. A positive outcome of NYR involvement for some was the adoption of a stronger performance culture driven by senior managers within the Library Service. This recognised the value of clearly showing the contribution that reading and literacy (and library service projects) can provide to the achievement of local targets and partner's strategic objectives.

Part 2: The NYR in Yorkshire case study – the librarians' perspective

The next section of the case study will focus on NYR related activities and outreach work in the Yorkshire region of England. This part of the country had a regional coordinator in place in, acting as a catalyst for external partners to be able to make contact, gain information and look for partnerships. This enabled many creative and imaginative projects to take place throughout the year. The regional coordinator also provided support by providing training, mentoring, skills sharing and partnership work across the region and four development days were offered for library staff. The first development day brought librarians together from across the region to gather information and share ideas with an emphasis on peer learning. This positive

emphasis on sharing ideas and exchanging experiences was exemplified in the creation of the Wikireadia resource.

The Yorkshire regional co-ordinator was interested in mapping impact and built an evaluation project into the work of the regional steering group. Researchers from Leeds Metropolitan University were contracted by MLA Yorkshire to carry out a longitudinal evaluation of the social impact of the NYR in Yorkshire. The Generic Social Outcomes (GSO) framework was used to help show evidence of the public library offering in two contrasting public library authorities, Calderdale and North Lincolnshire (Rankin, 2012; Rankin et al. 2009). This study involved the gathering, analysis and interpretation of information from semi-structured interviews with librarians and group discussions with NYR steering groups. The Generic Social Outcomes (GSOs) was developed and piloted by the Burns Owen Partnership (BOP) in 2005. The (GSO) framework was devised using a bottom up process of developing the framework with practitioners and a top down process of aligning the sector's potential social contribution with key drivers of government policy. The result was the creation of three broad thematic areas referred to as first tier outcomes. The first tier in the GSO framework are: Stronger and Safer Communities, Strengthening Public Life, and Health and Well-Being. These are then sub divided into more detailed areas (MLA, 2008). The GSO framework can be used by practitioners to help provide evidence for how public libraries contribute to diverse agendas and demonstrate their value to the community. Public library authorities can use this evidence for planning and for advocacy with a range of audiences including local and central government.

Outreach and engagement – what happened in Yorkshire

There was a year of engagement around reading and literacy – public library services have many activities and services on offer all year round, and events were 'badged' as part of the NYR to gain extra publicity. The evidence showed that many new events and activities were held, using the NYR as an opportunity to try out partnerships and entice the public to get involved. These activities included new literary festivals, reading volunteer schemes, manga sessions in the public library and outdoor events involving pop up libraries. Here are the words of one of the many librarians who rose to the challenge:

'The NYR has pushed towards a service located outside the library. Were it not for the NYR we would have contented ourselves with providing stock within the library and the outreach might not have happened'.

Another benefit for the library practitioners was increased knowledge of different genres and types of events possible. A librarian in North Lincolnshire organised the physical space for a brand new event to take place and recognised the value in connecting with a community of potential users:

'The Manga event brought all sorts of people in to the library who have never been before. I want to go one step further and consult those people about using our services'.

Information on NYR related events was posted to Wikireadia, promoted via library web sites and also offered photo opportunities for local newspapers keen to record

community involvement. Although many partnerships existed before the campaign, undoubtedly the public library profile was raised through NYR. This encouraged partners to approach the library to be involved in new initiatives and enabled libraries to show impact in helping children and young people to enjoy life and make a positive contribution. The library interviewees who recorded their views during year felt extremely strongly that partnerships were a key aspect of the NYR activities. Here are two examples:

'There will be people in Early Years teams or Education departments, who have the same outlook on life as children's librarians, who are there to encourage children to want to have that experience of reading, and reading for pleasure. ... so you know, there are good partnerships there already but the NYR has given us an opportunity to provide extra focus.'

'We are involved with the 'Every Child a Talker' project and we took the transportable library to the strategic launch of ECaT - and that made it possible for the parents and practitioners there to see the librarians sharing stories one on one with the children and modelling storytelling. We brought books that are tailor made for helping with speech and conversation - these were displayed on rugs on the floor for the children and parents to look at and handle. This all helped to get the message across that parents can play an important role in helping their children to learn to read, and can act as good role models in promoting reading behaviour.'

It is interesting to review the comments from library interviewees in phase 2 of the evaluation project, eighteen months after the NYR campaign had finished. There is evidence that effective connections were made at the practitioner level:

'We do a lot of partnership work – we are heavily involved now in Every Child a Talker - our profile was raised in NYR and that means that the people we work with come to us now without us having to push it'

The steering groups in both the Yorkshire case study local authorities had some success in their joint endeavours, but there were challenges in working in NYR partnership activities. The NYR steering groups brought together people with different organisational agendas and expectations of the campaign. For the library staff the opportunity to get involved in NYR activity had a clear purpose as the promotion of reading and reader development is core business. There were positive outcomes in the two locations, driven by highly motivated practitioners who were using the NYR as a focal point for showcasing new projects and refreshing ideas about existing provision. The NYR proved to be an opportunity for stimulation and was effective in further developing existing and new partnerships. The Yorkshire librarians reflected positively upon the challenges offered by the NYR. These included initial problems about NYR promotion and publicity and the difficulties of getting the year underway with minimal time to plan and implement. The campaign provided the impetus for joint events and initiatives, some were built on existing relationships, some relationships were consolidated and others planted seeds for the future.

Using the NYR activities, the GSO framework helped show how libraries can contribute to diverse agendas and demonstrate their value in the community. The Yorkshire evaluation showed that there is a wealth of good-will and professionalism evident among the library staff and it is clear that there is a keenness not only to improve services but also to contribute to the betterment of the lives of local people. As indicated, NYR provided a strong focus to the year, and helped raise the profile of library services in both the local authorities. The NYR has certainly had an impact on the visibility of reading in communities and the analysis of the evidence gives an indication of the enthusiasm and professionalism involved in delivering the campaign. Here is an example of adventurous outreach planning shared during an interview:

Do you know the children's book 'We're going on a Bear Hunt'? We are going to recreate that as part of an Art in the Park weekend. We are going to tell the story as we walk through the long grass and I'm planning to be dressed in a bear costume. When we were first thinking of hiring a bear costume they were all booked because it is the same weekend as the Book Start day but we have located one now. I have been out planning my route - I think the event will have a real impact, and be something different, and capture families who are not coming through a library or a reading event but are coming to an art and craft event.

This event took place in Normanby Hall Country Park, near Scunthorpe and is a great example of the energy and enterprise of library staff during the NYR. It attracted hundreds of children and their families. As the librarian with experience of dressing in a bear suit expressed it: '*Doing library promotion in a country park was an unexpected outcome of NYR*'. As well as running the Bear Hunt the library staff created a children's library on the grass providing lots of books for families to share. The 'Bear Hunt' also showed how with the support of the children's library service, a day out in the park could offer a safe, inclusive environment. This intergenerational experience provided the opportunity to read books and engage in interactive stories in an unusual setting. Pop-up libraries, guerrilla libraries, instant libraries and libraries in unusual places were used to good effect during the NYR to surprise and reach audiences not traditionally engaged with reading services.

Conclusion

Librarians play a key role as reading champions and information brokers supporting all sections of the community and including the digital natives of the 21st century. They provide active intervention in 'reader development' by increasing confidence and enjoyment of reading and opening up reading choices. One hard hitting observation from a library practitioner raises challenges for making those creative connections:

'The other challenges are the kind of skills you now need to do librarian's job – marketer, seller, cold caller. Traditionally librarians have been seen as introverted. Librarians now have to be extroverted campaigners, engaging with people. We have to be almost brazen and pushy. We have seen the need to change. Librarians are out and about much more making connections – we are less deskbound. It doesn't suit everyone. So partnerships are important.'

The feeling of achievement and accomplishment might be best summed up in the very positive comment made by one librarian 'Why can't every year be a National Year of Reading?' As with many children's stories, this leads nicely on to commenting on what happened next - once the NYR campaign came to an end. To build on the success of the NYR, the Reading for Life campaign was launched in 2009 with the aim of improving the life opportunities of people in most need through reading. Online resources and support materials developed in the NYR are available via the Reading for Life website at www.readingforlife.org.uk. The evidence indicates that the NYR in 2008 had a big impact on the visibility of reading in communities, on the variety of reading places and provision from more diverse agencies and organisations. Librarians are continuing to encourage reading for pleasure and as a means of learning, achievement and individual prospects. Reading anything, anytime, anywhere is good!

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NLT www.literacytrust.org.uk

Reading for Life <http://www.wordsforlife.org.uk/>

The Reading Agency <http://readingagency.org.uk/>

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